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TEXT prose

Ann Nonn

Dear Colleague

Dear Colleague,

There are a few good guys in the Academy. I am saddened to learn that you are not one of them.

Disappointed,
The office next door.

Dear Workmate,

I'm in shock. It's Tuesday afternoon and one meeting with a student shifts everything I think I know.

I'm not in denial though. The student is easy to believe. The story is full of things I know to be true. Everything fits into place. But suddenly I am looking at everyone differently now. Questioning my judgement.

We work in a university, so we like an intellectual challenge, but this one is emotional too. How did I miss this? Who can I trust?

Upset,
A.

Dear Fucker,

Why is it so hard to keep your pants on? I really don't find it difficult.
Just keep that zip zipped up.

I don't even find it difficult to surround myself in the work-place with other people who are fully clothed. Of course, I don't have complete control over others, but I've never inspired someone to spontaneously disrobe in my office.

If you have trouble keeping your pants on, perhaps this is not the job for you. Perhaps you'd be better off in a profession with less interpersonal contact, in every sense.

FFS,
Ann

Dear Friend,

I know now that you have lied to me for years. Manipulated me and others around us, to keep your dirty secrets. I realise that this is part of the fun for you. I did not want to play your sick games. But your lies meant that I had no choice.

Did I ever really know you? I replay our daily interactions and see disquieting nuances, ominous machinations. Was there ever an encounter you weren't gaming for your own ego and amusement?

Collaterally damaged,
Ann

Dear Cliché,

It's all so utterly familiar, almost predictable. Of course, she's half your age. Of course, she's blonde. Of course, you told her you'd left your wife and kids. That's how this always goes with men like you, isn't it?

I guess you'll ride off into the sunset in a new red sports car or a loud motorbike, just to complete the picture.

Should've seen it coming,
Ann

Dear Teacher,

You used the institution as your alibi. You cultivated a façade as a person of insight, learning, generosity. The institution gave you a place, a title, a role, that allowed you to swan into people's lives and shatter them.

The institution gave you a position of power. With that seal of approval, people gave you their trust. You exploited all this. You exploited her.

I hope you can learn to be a better human.

Always a teachable moment,
Dr. Ann

Dear Thinker,

I know you like to style yourself as a Thinking Man. An intellectual. Deep.

So, what the hell were you thinking? Others have already suggested that you weren't thinking at all, but driven by something more primal. I disagree. I suspect you were thinking about your own power, the irresistibility of your body, the magnitude of your brilliance. You were thinking entirely about yourself.

What are you thinking now? Do you see the ripples of impact radiating from you? Do you trace the implications?

Confused,
A.

Dear Problem,

I was planning to draft a journal article this week. But instead I meet with staff in Human Resources about how to handle this. You. I meet with your student, with my boss, with your boss.

I was planning to read and think and develop ideas and construct arguments. But instead I check policy, I consult, I document. I spend my days trying to tidy up a mess you've spent years constructing. It cannot be tidied, of course. But the careening snowball takes effort to stop.

Exhausted,
Ann

Dear Predator,

You have damaged a vulnerable young woman. She came to you to learn. You manipulated her. You toyed with her. You hurt her. I want you to carry the weight of that damage with you for the rest of your life, as I guess that she will.

This pain is not part of the learning experience. This pain is not fodder for your next novel or even hers. This pain is completely unnecessary. This pain is caused by you.

Horrificed,
Ann

Dear Workshop Leader,

I know you're good at cultivating intimacy with students and I think that's part of what makes you a good creative writing teacher. You encourage students to feel confident exposing their vulnerabilities, because it makes for compelling writing.

You support students to open up and accept each other's limitations without moral judgement. This fosters productive feedback. The workshop is a space

for testing ideas and their expression, which means that sometimes writers get it wrong. We work, side-by-side and together, on improving our writing and our understandings of each other.

A good writing workshop can reveal deeply personal feelings and experiences. Some even argue that it should. This helps the writers and their writing to connect with issues of social significance, to connect with their readers.

As teachers, we share in these intimacies along with our students. This is part of what makes teaching creative writing so draining and so rewarding. But good writing teachers also draw boundaries, explicitly and implicitly. You're not so good with boundaries, and I think that's part of what makes you a bad creative writing teacher. This is precisely where students need our guidance, because learning intimacy without boundaries is a sad story with an unfortunate ending.

Work in progress,
Ann

Dear Employee,

How did your meeting with the boss go? Did you sweat? Did you squirm? Did you admit to your transgressions?

Was she stiff, formal, harsh? Did she reprimand?
Was she enquiring? Did she sympathise? Did she educate?

Did you rationalise? Did you minimise? Did you spin more lies?

Wishing to be a fly on the wall,
Ann

Dear Creep,

Where can women go to escape your leering gaze? Where could she have gone just to learn? To experiment, to be challenged, to be respected? Is there a place beyond the dull hum of your rapacious desires?

She followed directions, but the timetable, the classroom, the office were not safe for her. Because of you.

Disgusted,
Ann

Dear Ex-Colleague,

You tell me that you're sorry. About what you did? Or just sorry that you got caught?

You say you'd like to rebuild trust. Save that for your wife.

I guess what you mean is that you want to rebuild your career. I'm not sure you deserve that.

Yours truly,
Ann Nonn

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