

## The Tattoo

*Another 'Darren and Bonnie' story. I feel pretty safe writing this one, since Darren has already made the timetable and won't be able to stick me with 3/4/5 PhysEd or Grade 10 Cooking in the fall. And as long as I stay far away from Bonnie and Melanie, what trouble could I be in?*

.....

It had been a long Monday afternoon, one of those days when you wonder if it's ever going to end and you can send the kids home. But the last of the noisy Jr. High boys had been loaded onto their buses (for some reason they were always the last to leave the building) and the school was finally quiet.

With no weekly staff meeting to attend for a change, Darren, Kate, Mindy, Bonnie and I were sitting around the office, unwilling as yet to tackle the schoolwork that awaited each of us. Darren was in an unpleasant mood.

"All this work is really getting to me." he groaned. "I need something to take the edge off. I'm not sure what ..."

"Probably something alcoholic!" Mindy suggested.

"No, not that ... " Kate interrupted. "Darren doesn't drink."

We laughed.

"What I think he needs ..." Kate was about to make her own suggestion, but Darren wasn't finished.

"I know what I need. I need a tattoo!"

"What??" Kate and Mindy chorused at the same time. "You're a Principal! You can't ..."

"Says who!? I can get a tattoo if I want one!"

I couldn't resist jumping in. "OK, I know. Why not an Edmonton Oilers logo ... maybe somewhere hidden ... out of sight ... they lose so often, you probably don't want it to be too visible ..."

Darren looked at me with a sarcastic frown. I never knew you could frown sarcastically, but I've noticed that Darren is a master at it. Especially in staff meetings.

"1967, wasn't it? The last time the Toronto Maple Leafs won the Stanley Cup??"

I had no comeback for that. It was true that I was a Leafs fan. Myself and one other person west of Manitoba. And he'd died eighteen years ago.

"You aren't really serious about getting a tattoo, are you, honey bunny?" Kate sounded worried.

She must have been. Kate only calls Darren 'honey bunny' when no-one else is around.

“Yeah, I am. Just a little one. On my upper arm, I think. But I don’t know what kind of design I want yet.”

Bonnie had been silent through all of this. We suspected she was still a little embarrassed about the thirty-seven cases of ultra-soft toilet paper she’d mistakenly ordered the previous week. They weren’t returnable. At the moment they were being stored in the back room of the office. We hadn’t been able to pick up our mail in days.

But she couldn’t contain herself. “Darren ... do you really want a tattoo?”

“Yeah, Bonnie. I’ve thought about it a lot. I’m wondering how expensive it will be ...”

Bonnie was jumping up and down in her seat now. You can always tell when Bonnie is excited. She vibrates.

“No, no, no, Darren. I can do it for you, and it won’t cost you anything!”

“What do you mean, ‘do it *for me*’? I want a *real* tattoo!”

“No, you don’t understand, Darren. I sent away for a home tattoo kit last year. I’ve tried it out a couple of times, and it works great! I can do colours and everything!”

“Let me get this straight. You have the equipment to do tattoos ... and you’ve used it? It works? No-one died? Who did you try it on?” Darren looked skeptical.

Bonnie explained. “Well, after it arrived last spring, I was going to do one for Brooke, but she changed her mind ...”

“Smart decision!” Now Darren was being sarcastic again. But Bonnie was oblivious.

“No, no. She couldn’t decide between a ‘Care Bear’ or a ‘My Little Pony’, so she decided to wait. But I did one for Melanie while she was here ...”

“What??” That was Mindy and I. At the same time.

“It’s true. She can never remember her cell phone number, so she had it tattooed on the top of her foot ...”

“What??” We were repeating ourselves. Again.

“Probably not the smartest thing she’s ever done. Turned out to be a little inconvenient ... every time she has to give her phone number to someone, she has to take her shoe and sock off ...”

We began to suspect that Bonnie might be having some fun at our expense. But she continued.

“And you’ve seen Jessie’s tattoo, right? On the back of her neck?”

“No, I don’t ...”

“A tiny little quadratic equation? She really loves Math. She hasn’t learned about quadratic equations yet, but she wants to be ready ...”

Now we weren’t sure what to believe. But Mindy asked the obvious question.

“Do you have one?”

“A tattoo? No, silly. I have to operate the equipment. I can’t give *myself* a tattoo”. That sounded reasonable. “But Paige really liked the small image of Justin Beiber I did for her ...”

“You did?” Darren found that hard to believe. “Where ...”

“I can’t tell you that. But she really likes it!” Bonnie looked pleased with herself.

“Uh, OK ... I guess you *do* know how to do tattoos. But ...”

“I’ll do one for you, Darren. For free. Just decide what you want, and what colours you’d like.”

“Does it hurt?”

“Are you kidding? Glen let me do his, and he hardly cried at all.”

“Well ...”

“Darren, go for it! What have you got to lose?” That was Mindy.

“Can we all watch?” It seemed that Kate was on board with the idea. “I’ll hold your hand while she does it ...”

So Darren agreed to let Bonnie give him a tattoo.

He spent the next week looking over designs. He eventually chose a small image of an eagle in flight. When he showed it to us, we were all impressed.

“That’s really cool, Darren. I can do that!” Bonnie seemed very confident. “How about after school today, here in the office? I brought all the equipment!”

“Uh ... I guess so. You’re sure you can do this eagle?”

“Piece of cake! Even easier than the spider I did for Bill ...”

“Bill got a ...”

“Hey, let’s just keep that quiet, OK?” I jumped in. It had been a moment of weakness. And if my sister ever found out about the spider on my shoulder, she’d never let me in her house again. Spiders are for her what wasps are for me.

Bonnie continued. “Anyway, trust me .. I can do an eagle. You’ll love it!”

So that afternoon we all got together to watch Bonnie give Darren a tattoo. We hadn't had this much fun since Mindy had brought her horse to school and we had to watch her give it an enema.

"Bonnie ... what is all this stuff?" Darren looked worried. And with good cause. The staffroom table was full of equipment, and not all of it was easily identifiable. Some of it looked quite sinister.

"Well, this is the doohickey that makes the tattoo ..." She held up a metal device that closely resembled a gun, except for the wickedly sharp needle protruding from the tip. "... And this is where the ink goes, and ..."

"Wait a minute ... doohickey??"

"I'm sure there's a technical term for it. It's probably in the manual ..."

"Wait just a minute ... you didn't read the manual??" Darren was starting to perspire.

"No, but I figured everything out. Trust me, OK? Now roll up your sleeve and give me your arm!"

Darren somewhat reluctantly bared his arm, while Bonnie loaded the ink in the appropriate container and laid out the alcohol swabs.

"So let's see the picture again ..." Bonnie took the picture of the eagle that Darren had brought with him. "Very nice. I'm sure I can do a good job with this ..."

"I'm not really ..."

"No backing out now, Darren. Here ..."

"Owww! Oh, that hurt! Stop! What did you ..."

"It was just the alcohol swab, Darren. Relax, will you? I know what I'm doing!"

Bonnie started the pump, and the noise of the motor drowned out any further protests that Darren may have been making. In fact, as she began to draw on his arm with the needle, we could see his mouth working, and various expressions of pain cross his face, but all was lost in the rattling din of the pump.

The rest of us tried to watch, but Bonnie was hunched over Darren, concentrating on what she was doing, and with Darren's arms and legs flailing around, none of us could get close anyway.

Bonnie turned off the pump. "There ... half done! Now ..."

"Nooooo! I changed my mind! Stop! I don't want ..."

"Patience, Darren ... I just have to do the wings ..." and she turned the pump on again. Darren's protests were once again drowned out by the noise.

Within a few minutes, Bonnie had drawn the last line, and she spent a few moments wiping up the blood and the excess ink. There was a remarkable amount of blood. I pointed that out. "Bonnie, are you sure ..."

"It's a little messy, I know. But it's supposed to be that way." She looked down at Darren. He'd fainted. "Well, when he wakes up, I'm sure he'll like it."

Sure enough, two minutes later Darren opened his eyes. "Well, that wasn't too bad. Can I look now?"

Bonnie gave his arm a final wipe and stepped out of the way. Darren looked down.

"Agghhh! It looks like a chicken!"

"What do you mean, a chicken?" Bonnie was annoyed. "You're looking at it upside down! It's an eagle!"

The rest of us gathered around for a look. The image engraved into Darren's upper arm did indeed resemble ... a chicken.

"Uh, Bonnie?" Mindy was a little hesitant to say anything, but she did anyway. "It's a chicken ..."

"I'd have to agree, Mindy". I spoke up. "That definitely does resemble a chicken. Although maybe a fierce chicken. And I like the way its little wings are sort of flapping ..."

I guess I shouldn't have said that.

"It is a chicken! I wanted an eagle! Who has a tattoo of a *chicken!* You know how much I *hate* chickens!"

It was true. Darren seemed to have a phobia about chickens. No-one was really sure why, but we all remembered how he'd been chased across the school yard by one the previous year; Mindy had been responsible for that.

"I want it off! I don't want a flapping chicken on my arm!" Darren was pretty upset. We hadn't seen him this upset since Bonnie had ordered him a pink computer, to match the walls in his office. He still grumbled about that.

"Calm down, Darren! I can take it off ... no problem!" Bonnie was trying hard not to panic. "I ordered the laser removal kit too. It works just fine. We've tried it. Here, look!"

She pulled some more equipment from a box that was under the table. "See ... this laser will remove all the ink, and you'll hardly be able to ..."

"You said you've tried it?" I was a little nervous about Bonnie handling a laser. I'd seen her use the laminator.

"Well, not on tattoos. But Glen used it to kill a coyote in our back yard the other day ..."

Darren interrupted. "Wait! Wait! The laser you used to kill a coyote ... you're going to point that at *me*? I don't think so!"

He didn't wait for an answer; he grabbed his arm, boosted himself out of the chair, and dashed out the door.

Bonnie wasn't giving up. She called after him "Darren, wait! It really does work ..."

As she said that, she waved the laser in the general direction of Mindy, who yelped as one eyebrow began to sizzle.

Bonnie quickly turned the laser off and began putting her equipment away. "Well, I suppose it did sort of look a *little* like a chicken. But it was a *cute* chicken ..."

So Darren got his tattoo, and a fine looking chicken it was, a very intimidating chicken in fact, although he wouldn't show it to anyone, and began regularly wearing long-sleeved shirts.

After a while we all sort of forgot it was there. Except once in a while, during a staff meeting that had run on a particularly long time, someone would utter a 'cluck cluck', causing the meeting to be brought to a rapid close amid scattered laughter.

.....  
*Just to set the record straight, neither I nor Darren actually has a tattoo. Melanie does, however, exactly as described in this story.*

*All my short stories can be seen at <http://www.worsleyschool.net/stories/stories.html>*