

The Classroom at the End of the Hall



“Parents say the classroom is haunted,” Mr. Leeks, the custodian at Walter T. Melon Elementary, told us on the first day of school.

He leaned on his mop handle as if it were a crutch. He raised a bushy gray eyebrow and squinted an eye. His whiskers rasped like sandpaper as he stroked his narrow chin.

“And sometimes in the evening when I’m mopping the hallway, I hear sounds myself coming from that room—that room at the end of the hall,” he said. “I hear desks banging shut, and chalk squeaking on the blackboard. I hear creaks from the floor and scrapes from the ceiling. Gives me the willies, it does.”

Back hunched, the custodian took a few swishes with his mop. He stopped suddenly and stared at us again. The hairs in his nose quivered when he snorted and said, “And let me tell you, youngsters, I’ve seen things as well in that room—that room at the end of the hall. Take for instance just last night, while I was sweeping the playground. You know how the moon is extra round and bright on the evening before school starts? Well, let me tell you, youngsters, last night moonbeams shone through the classroom windows and fell like a spotlight upon the teacher’s desk. And there, as stiff as a flagpole, sat a man—a large, burly man with a bushy black beard. At first I thought

he was a wax figure, some store mannequin, but when he raised a finger and pointed to a desk I nearly lost my teeth. Yes sirree, that's all he did, raise a finger and point."

Mr. Leeks swished his mop back and forth, back and forth, as he asked us, "Now tell me, youngsters, can you guess who that man was?"



We shook our heads.

Here the custodian stared over our shoulders. With a shaking, crooked finger, he pointed to a painting hanging above the front door of the school.

Now he spoke in a whisper. “That’s Walter T. Melon himself, I’m telling you. The very man I saw in the room at the end of the hall. They say he was a great teacher at one time. They say he was the very best of them. But let me tell you”—and he leaned toward us so that we could smell his sour breath—“they also say that man died some twenty years back.”

The custodian wiped his thin lips with the back of his hand. Again he leaned on his mop handle and stared down the hall as if studying our classroom door on the far end.

“I’m telling you, youngsters, and I can’t put my finger on it exactly, but something odd, something strange, something peculiar ...” He stopped and stared right through us. “Something extraordinary goes on in that room at the end of the hall.”

Mr. Leeks plunged his mop into the water bucket. “Now the bell is about to ring, youngsters,” he said, pushing hard on a lever to squeeze out the mop. “Hope you have yourselves a fine school year.”