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# Pranksters at Play

Tales Out of School

*Semper Vigilate Sobriique Estote*

MEL ANTHONY



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## DEDICATION

For 'mi Encantadora', Isabel  
and 'mi Alegria', Elena  
and 'mi Tesoro', Joseph  
*de su abuelito, siempre – con todo mi corazòn*

## NOTICE

The author freely admits that St. Timothy's is modelled upon St. Mary's College, Brockville, but he advises that all of the characters and events in *Pranksters at Play: Tales Out of School* are fictitious and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

The author is aware of the heinous crimes committed against so many defenceless boys in boarding schools. *Pranksters at Play: Tales Out of School* is not an apologetic for the guilty. This story is a fictionalized look back on the most contented and carefree years of his life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author thanks the members of *The Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer* for the dedication, kindness and, yes, the love with which they made men of mere boys; especially for this: *Quia apud Dominum misericordia et copiosa apud eum redemptio.*

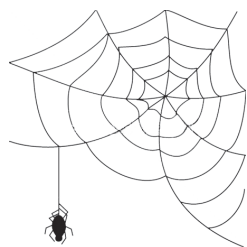
I want to acknowledge the many people without whom I would not, indeed could not, have seen this endeavour through to completion; especially Bob A., Bob F, Gretchen H., Odette M., Caroline W., and the good folks at Agio Publishing House, all of whom had more confidence in me than I had in myself.

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## Prelude



As his elementary school career draws to a close, Emerson Jenks, prankster extraordinaire, plans what is to be his *grande finale*: his *pièce de résistance*.

The second Friday in June begins like any other school day. Teachers report for duty. Students arrive, on foot or peddling bikes. The grade eight girls saunter to their classroom early, skirts swaying. They bunch up near the cloakroom and giggle. Each clutches her books to her chest in a two-armed embrace. At the last possible moment, the boys in the class arrive, running and jumping, their shirttails un-tucked. Two or three – the usual suspects – are tardy. They have been waylaid by the discovery of pollywogs in the pond.

But this Friday proves somewhat different from other Fridays. The end of the school year is within sight, so the children are more keyed up than usual. Furthermore, because this Friday is a payday, the teachers are distracted. Young Master Jenks has long anticipated such favourable conditions.

Morning lessons and recess prove uneventful. But, less than five minutes before noon, Emerson's teacher acknowledges his raised hand. Seeing no reason to keep the boy from making a trip to the washroom, she dismisses him. Emerson steps from the classroom, exercises caution in retrieving the brown paper bag he has hidden, and leaves the building.

The bell sounds.

As he has done every payday, Mr. Collins, the school principal, intent on getting to the bank and back over the lunch hour, dashes across the lawn towards the parking lot. He comes up short and stares in horror at his car. Spider-web-like cracks spread out from a baseball-sized rock embedded in his windshield. Tiny cubes of glass litter the car's hood. The principal curses under his breath, throws his hands over his head and, turning on his heel, storms back into the building. Without benefit of consultation and, more consequentially, without thinking, he rings the bell a second time, summoning one and all to the auditorium.

A crowd forms. The principal rants. He raves. He describes his deep disappointment. He cautions his charges. Grave consequences await the person responsible if he does not confess. Mr. Collins pleads. He cajoles. He lectures on honesty and the dangers of stone throwing. These tactics fail. In desperation, he resorts to the hackneyed tale of how the child of a friend of a friend's cousin had his eye knocked out by a stone. This scheme fails too... miserably. The principal initiates a silent interrogation of his charges, scanning the assembly with squinty, accusing eyes. Students inspect their fingernails, or gaze up at the ceiling... or down at the floor... or at one another. Anywhere but at Mr. Collins.

Young Miss Shaw, deeply affected by her fearless leader's rhetoric and righteous indignation, suggests that the students be marched outside to see the results of so craven a delinquent's misdeed. Collins declares this a capital idea. The students parade out the door, side by side: reluctant sheep led from the cote. The principal plays shepherd; the teachers,

border collies. Collins scrutinizes each face as the students pass and tries several ruses in hopes of tripping up the culprit.

“Mr. Jenks?” the principal barks as Emerson reaches him.

In response, the boy nods, slides his glasses into place and, while sidling past, replies, “Sir?” Emerson believes his prank will turn out to be even funnier than he intended.

Mr. Collins brings up the rear. Students fan out as they shuffle towards his big black Buick. The principal pushes through the silent crowd shouting, “Just look at what you’ve done!” It is with no small measure of bewilderment that he discovers a perfectly sound windshield.

In utter disbelief, the teachers stare at their open-mouthed leader. With a loud sniff and a scowl, Miss Shaw glares at Mr. Collins. A look of contempt crosses her face as her grade four students begin to snigger. Female students titter. Male students guffaw. The bewildered car owner does not begin to recover until one of the older boys – not Emerson Jenks to be sure – raises his hand.

“Can we go back to our games now, Sir?” the wag asks.

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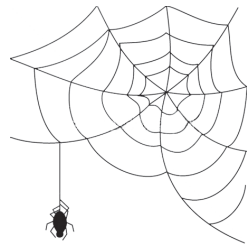
While his mates shot shifty-eyed glances at the classroom clock, eagerly counting down the seconds until lunch hour, Emerson hurried to the parking area, decorated the principal’s windshield and, as soon as the bell sounded, hastened away and hid behind a hedge. From his hiding spot, he watched Mr. Collins approach his car. When the man returned to the school, Emerson raced to the vehicle and removed a battered Styrofoam ball, bits of shattered auto glass and a thin sheet of clear plastic film upon

which he had handcrafted an intricate spider web design. By the time Mr. Collins rang the bell a second time, Emerson had already disposed of the evidence. The boy melted into the mob running back to the school in response to their principal's summons.

With a good deal of pride and self-satisfaction, Emerson mused upon as clever a prank as one could ever hope to carry off. The only real harm done had been the slight dent in the humiliated principal's ego. Furthermore, as planned, the perpetrator of the prank would remain forever anonymous.

Throughout the long, hot and humid summer, Emerson contemplated the prospect of beginning grade nine at St. Timothy's Preparatory School and planned how he might top that elementary school graduation prank.

# Off Like a Herd of Turtles



“Emerson?”  
No reply.

“Emerson!” Judy Jenks peered through the screen door into her kitchen, hoping to collar her missing son. The kitchen was empty. “Yoo-hoo... Emerson,” she called. “Em-er-son!”

When the boy did not answer, she entered the house for the umpteenth time that morning. She passed through the kitchen into the parlour – still no Emerson. From the bottom of the stairs, she called out, “Emerson? Are you up there, Emerson? Come down.” She paused, then added in a sterner voice, “Come on, Dad’s ready to go. We’ll be late.”

Emerson did not answer. Emerson’s older sister, Glenda, answered. She rolled over in bed and whined, “Why’d he be up here, Mom?” After a short pause, she continued, “What time’s it anyways?”

“Just past six, Sweetie,” replied her mother. “Where is that boy?”

“How should I know?” Glenda muttered just loudly enough not to be heard downstairs. She glowered, pulled the covers over her head, drew her knees up to her chin and grumbled, “How’s a person s’posed to sleep ’round here?” As an afterthought, she called out, “Mom, he’s just pulling one of his stupid stunts again. That’s all.”

She wasted her words. Mrs. Jenks had hurried off on her quest.

Behind the wheel of the family’s maroon station wagon, Peter Jenks grew increasingly agitated. “Where’d she get to?” he groaned and then wondered if he had whispered the words or only thought them. He revved the engine and thumped the horn with his fist. Three sharp blasts followed one sustained blare. “What’s the hold-up now?” the man muttered and then glanced behind him. “You passed your mother on the way out, didn’t you?”

“Nope,” replied the boy in the back seat as he looked up from his book and flipped a page. “I figured Mom was out here with you.”

Mr. Jenks drummed his fingers on the steering wheel and, with an almost silent sigh, glowered towards the kitchen door.

“Exasperated?” asked the boy.

“Exasperated?” replied his father. “Where on earth do you come up with these big words of yours?”

The boy did not answer.

“And what do you mean – *exasperated*?”

The boy removed his glasses and polished the lenses while keeping an eye on his father. “You sighed. And you’re drumming your fingers. You seem... well... exasperated.”

Feigning laughter, Mr. Jenks replied, “Well, I’m not. I’m just eager to be off. Aren’t you?” The man shook his head as he stared at his watch. “I figured you’d be raring to go.”

The boy grunted and fixed his eyes on the kitchen door.

Mrs. Jenks heard the engine and the horn. She grimaced, hung her head and sighed while saying, “He didn’t go back to bed... surely?” She rushed off to her boys’ room, pressed an ear to the door, cracked it open and squinted into the gloom. Only the sound of her two younger sons’ rhythmic breathing could be heard. She spotted a third body curled up under the covers on a second bed.

“Oh, Emerson!” she groaned before feeling her way across the darkened room. She poked the boy’s shoulder. Emerson was not in his bed. What had looked like a body, what she had thought was her son, proved to be nothing more than a pillow rolled up in a blanket.

Judy Jenks peeked into the family room – no Emerson. “Where are you?” she asked aloud. “Oh, dear!” she moaned. “Now he has me talking to myself.”

She poked her head into the bathroom – no Emerson; the basement – no Emerson. “I’m reaching the end of my rope,” she muttered just as a longer, more strident blast of the horn rang in her ears. She took a final peek into the parlour before dragging herself back to the car as if from the Slough of Despond.

“Emerson!” she exclaimed upon discovering her son in the back seat. “How on earth—”

“What kept you, Judy?” demanded her husband. “Come on. Let’s

go. We're already ten minutes late." He revved the engine as his dumbfounded wife stared at their son.

Mrs. Jenks collapsed into her seat and pulled her door closed. As the vehicle rolled ahead, she turned and stared long and hard at Emerson. The boy fidgeted with the straps on his knapsack and did not look up. "Emers..." began Mrs. Jenks. Her voice trailed off when the boy drew her attention to their neighbour's front window.

"Was that Mr. Wilson staring at us, Mom?" the boy asked as he directed her attention to the house next door.

Emerson's mysterious disappearance and miraculous reappearance faded into insignificance. "Oh, Peter," Judy Jenks wailed and pressed her hand to her mouth, "the horn. The neighbours. They'll all be staring."

"Wilson? Old George just wanted to see the boy off – that's all," replied Mr. Jenks. "St. Timothy's be prepared: Emerson Jenks is on his way. We're off like a herd of turtles." Mr. Jenks craned to see Emerson in the rear-view mirror. "Comfortable back there?" he asked.

The boy did not answer. Emerson turned and stared down the street to where Glenda, pinching the collar of her housecoat to her chin, stood and waved. The boy returned his sister's goodbye. Emerson removed a pamphlet from his knapsack, adjusted his glasses and pretended to read. Mr. Jenks turned his attention to the road while Mrs. Jenks fastened her eyes on her son. She opened her mouth to speak but decided not to interrupt the boy. Turning, she rested her head on a pillow and closed her eyes.

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Mrs. Jenks awoke as her husband was backing the car into a parking space. Disoriented, the woman looked about. The rumble of a moving van passing between the front of the vehicle and a restaurant gave her a start. Peter Jenks turned to her and smiled. "Hey, Sleepyhead. Ready to eat? It's almost—" he glanced at his watch, "—9:15. It's time for breakfast."

All three exited the vehicle.

"Make sure the car's locked, Emerson," Peter Jenks shouted as he slammed his door. He assumed that the boy's mumbled response had

been a 'yes'. The couple strolled across the parking lot. Their son lagged behind.

Inside the restaurant, Peter Jenks remained standing until his wife slid into the booth and Emerson took his seat next to her. Before sitting opposite them and without looking at the hostess, he said, "Coffee, please."

Judy Jenks noticed the hostess's slight hesitation and haughty, sideways glance. Her husband did not.

"Your waitress will be right with you," replied the hostess. The woman sounded bored to the point of tears. She had repeated those seven words a million times.

Mr. Jenks waved his menu in the air, halting the woman's retreat. "Black, no sugar," he added and smiled.

The woman's scowl registered only with Mrs. Jenks. A minute later, Peter Jenks gazed towards the kitchen and asked – just a bit too loudly – "Where on earth did she get to?"

Raising her eyes without raising her head, a mortified Judy Jenks checked to see if their neighbours had overheard.

When their server arrived, she poured Mr. Jenks' coffee while asking, "Youse guys ready tuh order?"

Mrs. Jenks cringed. Besides the screech of fingernails on a blackboard, only the word 'youse' caused her to cringe. That word, she frequently complained, made her feel like a sheep.

"I'll have the cheese omelette. Hash browns with sausage and toast. Extra butter on the toast," ordered Emerson's father and tossed the menu onto the table.

"Extra butter," repeated the waitress as she scribbled on her pad.

Judy Jenks bit her lip, hemmed and hawed and ran her finger over the prices. The waitress showed not the slightest sign of interest. The embodiment of boredom, she doodled daisies and chomped on a wad of gum the size of a golf ball. Presently, Mrs. Jenks ordered water and a poached egg on dry toast.

"Last of the big time spenders," whispered the waitress to the ceiling. To her order pad, she mumbled, "Dry toast."

The girl turned indifferent eyes on Emerson and blew a large, pink bubble which popped, eliciting a frown and loud 'tut' from Mrs. Jenks.

Emerson averted his eyes, slid his glasses up his nose and muttered into his menu.

“Better bring him the children’s special—” suggested Mr. Jenks, “or we’ll be here ’til Doomsday. Oh, and a refill,” he added, nodding towards his all-but-empty cup. To his wife and son he said, “I’m starved,” and, like a child making a Plasticine snake, rubbed the palms of his hands together. “What a day!” he said. “What... a... day!”

Mrs. Jenks rummaged through her purse without any idea of what she wanted. “You know, Peter, all that butter’s not good for you.”

“What?” demanded her husband and patted his stomach. “As fit as the day you married me, Judy.”

“Not in a month of Sundays,” muttered his wife into her handbag. To her husband she said, “Indeed!” She then studied her son’s face and asked, “How are you holding up, Emerson? Is everything okay?”

Emerson flashed a feeble smile and patted his mother’s hand. “Yeah, Mom... I’m fine,” he answered. “Honest.” He turned and stared out the window. Both parents noted their son’s pensive mood and imagined that the boy was off in his daydream world again. Their every attempt to engage Emerson in sustained conversation failed.

When breakfast arrived, Mrs. Jenks warned, “Don’t go dripping egg on your new blazer, Emerson. You either, Peter. They’d be impressed if you two showed up with egg all down the front of you, wouldn’t they? Do those ever look good,” she added and plucked a sausage from her wide-eyed husband’s plate. “You don’t mind do you, Dear?” She checked the sausage for flaws before taking a bite.

Twenty minutes later, Judy Jenks again set her purse on her lap and opened it. After extracting an amazing assortment of items, she found her lipstick and compact. “May I slide out, please?” she asked. “I’ll go freshen up while you two finish.” Emerson stood and stepped away from the table to allow his mother to pass.

“Can I go for a walk, Dad?” the boy asked. “I won’t go far, Mom.”

“May I go?” replied Mrs. Jenks. While his wife hesitated, Peter Jenks dismissed the boy with a wave of his hand. Before his mother could react, Emerson had fled to the lobby. Mrs. Jenks’ eyes followed him the entire way. “I *suppose* he’ll be okay,” she said, tentatively.

“He’s a month shy of thirteen, Judy,” replied her husband. A vision

of apron strings flashed in his mind. "If he can't go outside and walk around for five minutes – I mean – what can he do?"

"Six weeks," corrected Mrs. Jenks and hesitated. "I know you're right," she added. "But, Peter, it's so hard..." Mrs. Jenks stood in pensive silence for a moment then added, "I'd better go find a pay phone and call home. I want to see how Glenda is making out with the boys."

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Ten minutes later, Emerson peeked around the corner of the restaurant and watched his parents leave the building. Mrs. Jenks stopped on the top step, scanning the car park for any sign of her son. Mr. Jenks skipped down the stairs, patting the pockets of his pants and, stopping suddenly, executed a smart about-face before running his hands over the front of his jacket and locating his keys. He raised his eyes heavenward, turned towards his wife and waited.

As the two adults started off towards their vehicle, Emerson ran up from behind. "Can I open the doors, Dad?" he asked with outstretched hand.

"May I open?" Mrs. Jenks corrected. With the keys in his possession, Emerson scampered away. He unlocked both front doors and started back towards his parents.

"Want-uh start 'er up?" asked Mr. Jenks as the boy approached.

Emerson turned on his heel and sprinted back to the vehicle.

"Make sure you don't flood it. That's all," called his father after him. Peter Jenks could not ignore the vice-like grip on his arm. The epitome of calm, he spoke to his wife. "Relax, dear. It's in park... the emergency's on. Nobody's even near us. Look, even the guy behind is backing out."

Before Mrs. Jenks could give voice to her concerns, the car engine roared to life.

"See! Told you," declared her husband.

Emerson left the driver's door open and ran to the opposite side of the vehicle. When his mother arrived, he made an exaggerated bow, opened her door and swept his hand in a wide arc before her.

"Why thank you, kind sir," said a pleased Judy Jenks and took her seat.

"You're most welcome, *Madame*," replied Emerson and pushed the

door closed. The boy froze in place when he noticed that he had left his own door unlocked. He shifted his gaze to his parents; neither seemed to have noticed. He made a mental note to be more careful in future and then let his eyes sweep the parking lot before climbing into the back seat.

“Now that’s what I call a breakfast,” grunted Mr. Jenks and patted his stomach.

“Let’s get going, eh, Dad,” exclaimed Emerson.

“Well now. Look who’s in a big hurry all of a sudden,” replied Mr. Jenks with a chuckle.

“Let’s just go, Dad,” pleaded Emerson and glanced over his shoulder. “Please!”

Peter Jenks released the brake, dropped the gear lever into drive and cruised off towards the freeway.

The brawniest of three brawny truckers gestured towards the station wagon as if he wanted it to stop. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Jenks noticed. But Emerson noticed; Emerson always noticed. The men’s approach had prompted his request for a quick getaway.

Within minutes of entering the flow of eastbound traffic, Emerson’s father turned and interrupted his wife’s chatter. “Hon,” he asked, “any idea why all these trucks are honking when they go by?”

Mrs. Jenks looked up from the roadmap she had spread across her lap. “I hadn’t noticed,” she replied.

“They weren’t doing that before,” continued Mr. Jenks. “How ’bout you, Son?”

Before Emerson could answer, an eighteen-wheeler rumbled past, its horn blaring.

“There!” said Mr. Jenks. “See what I mean? They’re driving me crazy. What a dirty look I got too.”

Emerson’s tongue made a visible bulge in his cheek. He buried his face in some papers and pretended to read. Another semi gave the station wagon a prolonged blast in passing.

Mr. Jenks scowled. “What’s wrong with those stupid—”

“Little pitchers have big ears,” declared Mrs. Jenks, cutting off her husband’s remark.

"But he... he... he shook his fist at me," replied her husband. "Of all the nerve!"

Judy Jenks clenched her jaws, squinted and added, "Maybe you're driving a bit too slow, or—" She received a withering glare for her pains so turned to look out the side window, her back to her husband. She felt his eyes poking her between the shoulder blades.

"What's that you're looking at, Emerson?" asked Mrs. Jenks in contrived innocence after turning her attention to her son.

"Just some stuff, Mom," the boy answered.

"Stuff!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenks and shuttered. "How I hate that word. Let me see."

Emerson passed the *St. Timothy's Preparatory School Orientation Manual* to his mother.

"Why you've nearly got this worn out," she declared. "How many times have you read it?"

"Oh, a few. I guess," Emerson answered. "It's actually pretty interesting."

"Must be," replied his mother. She flipped through the document examining its dog-eared pages and smudged ink.

"Oh man! That does it," growled Mr. Jenks as another truck passed, roaring out what sounded like an angry opening to Beethoven's Fifth. "I'm getting off this road... Right here... Right now." Mr. Jenks lifted his foot from the gas pedal and steered onto an exit ramp.

"But where are we?" cried Mrs. Jenks. The woman tossed the manual to her son and fussed with her map. "Which exit was that, Peter?"

"No idea," replied Mr. Jenks, "but I'm getting off that freeway before I go stark raving mad." A moment later he added, "I think this takes us down to the river."

The narrow road wended its way around swamps, through cedar thickets and past dilapidated barns. The smells of late summer hung in the air. Cows stood in boulder-strewn fields, forlorn within their split-rail prisons. Mr. Jenks breathed a long, slow sigh of relief and smiled. "Now that's more like it," he announced. "No more traffic, no more horns. Except on those cows over there!"

"Oh, Peter!" chided Judy Jenks in mock horror.

"Don't you get it? Cow horns... and truck horns. It's a pun," Peter Jenks explained and then laughed at his own joke.

Mrs. Jenks' groan drowned out her son's quiet grumble. In vain, she began glancing at passing road signs in hopes of discovering their whereabouts. From time to time, she cast questioning, sidelong glances at her husband. She said nothing.

The road ended at a two-lane highway. The absence of the river he had anticipated finding there proved unsettling to the driver and more unsettling to his front seat passenger. Mr. Jenks turned left and continued eastward. Within minutes, he noticed fellow travellers acting strangely. They dallied behind before passing. On coming alongside, some smiled and waved in a friendly fashion. Some flashed the thumbs up sign. A few frowned. Peter Jenks returned subtle, self-conscious nods. "I don't get it," he exclaimed.

His wife shrugged. Emerson stared into his manual, glancing up from time to time, to see how his father was holding up under the strain. "Well, it sure beats those blasted horns," Peter Jenks declared.

The man enjoyed his peace and quiet... until he heard the siren. His foot jumped from the accelerator as if it had received an electric shock. His eyes darted to the speedometer and then to the rear-view mirror. A police car, its emergency lights flashing, sped up from behind.

"Must be an accident," advised Mr. Jenks. "Better let this guy get by."

He signalled, slowed, pulled onto the shoulder and stopped.

The family waited for the cruiser to fly past. It did not fly past. When Mr. Jenks glanced back, his mouth fell open. He screwed-up his eyes and stared. The cruiser, its lights still flashing, was parked immediately behind the station wagon. The car's lone occupant exited the vehicle, pushed his cap back on his head, hitched up his pants and, without further hesitation, approached the vehicle.

"Oh dear?" grumbled Mr. Jenks.

"Oh, Peter," cried Mrs. Jenks.

"Oh-oh!" whispered, Emerson.

"You weren't driving too fast, were you, Peter?" inquired his wife.

"Please?" her husband begged. He could have sworn she had ended her statement with the word 'again'.

Out of the corner of his eye, Emerson watched the officer signal the driver to lower his window. Involuntarily, the boy held his breath.

“Problem, Officer?” inquired Mr. Jenks. His valiant effort to sound nonchalant failed—utterly.

The man in the uniform placed both hands on the car’s roof, stooped forward and let his eyes run over the car’s interior. “The sign, Sir,” he announced at last. “Several people have complained about your sign.”

“Sign?” cried Mr. Jenks. “What sign?”

The officer beckoned. Mr. Jenks stepped out of the vehicle. Mrs. Jenks joined the two men at the rear of the station wagon. Emerson could see but not hear the adults. The drumming in his ears was deafening. The police officer pointed at a large sign taped to the tailgate. White letters on a dark blue background read:

*SHIP BY RAIL – BAN LONG HAUL TRUCKING.*

Mr. Jenks ripped the sign loose, folded it in half, tore it in two, folded it, tore it again and continued in this fashion until his strength deserted him. He hurled the pieces to the ground and kicked them unceremoniously into the ditch. The police officer cleared his throat and levelled his gaze first into the ditch and then into Mr. Jenks’ flushed face.

Mrs. Jenks cleared her throat – more loudly than the officer had. While she smiled apologetically at the officer, her husband retrieved the litter. After Mr. Jenks climbed back onto the roadside, the officer took what remained of the offending sign and swaggered back to his car. After giving the family a friendly wave and climbing behind the wheel, the man smirked, gave his head a shake and turned off his emergency lights. As Emerson and his parents stared, the officer executed a smart U-turn and sped off down the highway.

Mr. Jenks took his seat and buried his face in his hands before speaking. “That’s what was going on, Judy,” he wailed. “If I ever get my hands on the little—”

“Little pitchers, Honey!” Mrs. Jenks reminded her husband of their young passenger’s innocence.

The man restarted the car and pulled back onto the road. He began mumbling and, from time to time, thumped the steering wheel. Mrs. Jenks stole glances at her husband. Neither parent noticed the smug look on their son’s face. Several minutes passed before Mr. Jenks looked

at Emerson in the rear-view mirror. "Were you out by the car back there, Son?" he asked.

The boy's heart skipped a beat and his smirk vanished.

"You didn't see anyone suspicious hanging around, did you?" asked his father.

"No," replied Emerson and exhaled. "Nobody... Nobody at all."

The trip continued in silence. From time to time, Mr. Jenks grimaced and scratched his head. He made no comment even when the missing river finally appeared through the trees. Mrs. Jenks hummed. Emerson busied himself with his orientation manual and, when he thought it safe, observed his parents.

The meeting with the police taught Emerson to anticipate complications when planning similar pranks.

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Twenty minutes later, Mrs. Jenks broke into a cheerful chatter. "Almost there," she announced and turned her attention from her map to her son. "Are you alright back there?" she asked upon noticing Emerson's grim face. The woman nudged her husband and gestured towards the rear seat.

Mr. Jenks raised his head so he could see his son in the mirror. "Looks like you lost your best friend, Emerson. What's the matter?"

Upon hearing the word 'friend', Emerson stared at the floor. He said nothing. He had a plan and he could not imagine having a better opportunity to execute it. His silence and his frown had drawn his parents' attention. Now he needed them to coax some information out of him. The boy half-moaned, half-whispered his answer, "Everything's okay... I guess."

"Spit it out," demanded his father. "What's bothering you, Son?"

Emerson refused to respond.

"You have to let us know what's wrong or we can't help," added his mother.

"Well..." Emerson replied. He stared at the floor again. "I guess I'm going to - well - miss my friends... That's all." He turned his head and gazed out the side window. "It's okay though," he added for effect.

"Oh!" groaned Judy Jenks and fell silent when she noticed her

husband's stern expression. She had almost spoken the words 'my poor baby'.

"Emerson," declared the boy's father, "you'll make all kinds of new friends down here. You'll see."

"But that's not the same thing at all, Peter," argued Judy Jenks. "He's had the same friends... well... forever."

Emerson's eyes darted from one parent to the other. He said nothing while struggling to maintain the most forlorn expression he could muster.

"Anyway..." added Mr. Jenks, "there's no reason your friends can't come down to see you." He studied his son's reflection in the mirror. "Well, is there?"

When the boy's countenance remained grim, his father added, "Maybe we can bring one or two of the fellows when we come at Thanksgiving. How'd you like that?"

Emerson failed to suppress his delight. A smile crept across his face when his mother added, "You know, Emerson, Thanksgiving's not that far off!"

"You're making this way too easy," Emerson mumbled.

"What was that?" asked his father.

"I said, do you really think so?" replied the boy.

Upon seeing the joyful expression on Emerson's face, the boy's parents sighed: the father in relief, the mother in commiseration. They glanced at one another and smiled. Neither noticed their son's efforts to conceal a smirk. Neither noticed the twinkle in his eyes.

A few minutes later, Emerson blurted out, "Dad, I guess you'll have to ask him, eh?"

His father's face registered confusion. "Ask who what?"

"Ask whom?" interjected Mrs. Jenks. This grammar lesson went unheeded.

"Ask the headmaster if my friends can visit," explained Emerson.

"Oh, I think you can manage that on your own," responded Mr. Jenks. "I mean... you've got that meeting when we get there." He checked his watch. "When the headmaster asks if you have any questions, that's the time to bring it up, eh?"

"I guess," responded Emerson and turned to look out the rear win-

dow. The corners of the boy's mouth started to curl into a grin. He concealed the grin with his hand.

"Nearly there, Son," declared Mr. Jenks. The station wagon rolled onto the main street at the western edge of the city. "They said ten minutes east of town. Hey, we're still in pretty good time too."

With little more than ten minutes in which to prepare for his meeting with the headmaster, Emerson picked up the orientation manual and continued his silent study of the school's floor plans.

As they continued eastward, out of the city, the last in a line of great, grey limestone mansions, sentinels along the river, dropped from view. "Just look at that," exclaimed Mr. Jenks and pointed over an open field and across a wide expanse of sparkling blue water. "That's New York State over there," he announced. "A hundred and fifty years ago—"

Judy Jenks interrupted the impromptu history lesson. "Oh my goodness!" she cried. "It's so... so big." Agape, the woman pointed to several huge, red-brick buildings surrounded by a high, brick and wrought iron fence. "Oh, Peter, he'll never find his way around a place like that. I had no idea—"

"Relax, Judy. That's not St. Timothy's. It's a psychiatric hospital. And even if that was the school—"

His wife corrected him. "If it *were* the school—" she said.

"Okay! If it were the school, Emerson would know the place, top to bottom, inside a week. Right, Son?" Emerson glanced up, mumbled a non-committal reply and returned to his studies.

Mrs. Jenks' chatter ceased and she began to fidget. Five minutes later, she pointed left again. "That must be it," she cried as a large limestone building came into view.

"Gotta be!" replied her husband.

"Slow down, Peter. Turn right here," shouted Mrs. Jenks. The driver ignored his wife's comment and proceeded past the narrow tractor trail to which she had pointed and swung left between the school's stone gateposts. The car entered the deep shade beneath twin rows of tall maples that flanked the long gravel drive.

"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Jenks. "How beautiful! Like a tunnel."

"A cathedral," declared her husband and craned to look up into the interlacing branches.

Emerson stared up the drive. Through the inverted 'U' formed by the two rows of maples he could see the building's dark brown doors standing stark against its ivy-covered limestone. He noticed four steps leading to a landing and a steep, broad staircase climbing from there to the entrance. His eyes were drawn to a round, multi-paned, rose-shaped window above the doors. The building's red tile roof stood out against a clear, blue sky. At either end of the old structure were newly-built red-brick and glass additions.

Having reached the end of the lane, Mr. Jenks drove halfway around a grand curving driveway encircling a well-clipped expanse of grass in the centre of which was a manicured flower garden. He parked beneath a giant elm that stood guard just to the left of the main stairway.

Emerson's father switched off the engine and, for several seconds, stared ahead in silence. Finally, he turned to his son, swallowed hard and then said, "Well, my boy... we're here!"

Emerson leaned forward, draping his arms over the back of the front seat. His eyes darted about, taking in the scene, absorbing every detail. Mr. and Mrs. Jenks stepped from the car, joined several people on the lawn and, hand-in-hand, gazed up at the front of the massive main building. Mrs. Jenks stole several glances towards the car while she and her husband spoke to one another in whispers.

"Are you sure about this, Honey?" asked Mrs. Jenks. "Maybe if we wait another year he'd—"

"—Judy, Judy, Judy! You worry too much. The boy'll be fine. Just wait and see. He's going to love it here."

"I'm not so sure, Peter," added Mrs. Jenks. She bit her lower lip and shook her head. "We never even thought about him missing his friends. I just don't know—"

"Let's not panic. At least not 'til after he's talked to the headmaster, okay?"

"I suppose," replied Mrs. Jenks. The woman sounded doubtful. She continued glancing towards the station wagon. "It's just that he seems so frightened," she continued. "I know my son, Peter. Just look at him. The poor kid's too scared to get out of the car." Peter Jenks rubbed his wife's back, hoping to reassure her and calm her ragged nerves.

Judy Jenks did not know her son half as well as she imagined.

Emerson was neither a poor kid nor frightened. His decision to remain in the car was purely strategic. He watched several boys playing flag football on the broad front lawn. Between and around half a dozen other parked vehicles, at least a dozen others ran and romped, engaged in some form of tag. All were dressed in rough play clothes and created a racket much louder than Emerson thought St. Timothy's would tolerate. He shrugged. "All those guys have been here before," he said aloud. "That's for sure."

Groups of three to six people congregated on the lawn. In each was a boy dressed, like Emerson, in a dark blue blazer, a white shirt, grey slacks and a narrow school tie. New kids and their families, concluded Emerson with a nod.

Three boys, Emerson noted, sniggered and snorted while standing in a line at the foot of the main stairway. They too were dressed in blue blazers and grey pants. Repeatedly, the tallest punched his two companions on the shoulder and laughed. The victims' protests only invited more frequent jabs. Boss-man and his toadies, Emerson determined. "They look like the Three Stooges in schoolboy outfits," he muttered, smiling at the image that had popped into his mind.

Emerson recognized only Headmaster Fitzroy. The man had visited the Jenks' home several times in the past year. The short, dark-haired gentleman stood talking to a man, a woman and a young boy. The headmaster's efforts to extricate himself from the encounter were being thwarted at every turn. When the man took a step backwards, his companions stepped forward. When he half-turned and began to walk away, they followed. When the headmaster stopped, so did the father, mother and son.

Emerson shifted studious eyes from the headmaster to the stooges. When it was possible for Fitzroy to see them, the three boys stood ramrod straight with their hands clasped behind their backs. When the headmaster's back was turned, they tittered and talked, talked and tittered and tried to body check one another off balance. Emerson considered all that he saw, pursed his lips and nodded. "Yep, pretty much what I expected," the boy muttered and smiled.



# First Impressions

Young Emerson Jenks shook his head in disbelief as he evaluated the headmaster's performance. The man's unsuccessful attempts to shake off his guests proved especially amusing. The boy watched as a tall, redheaded, freckle-faced student hurried from the building. The three stooges snapped to attention and, after the boy spoke to them, exchanged half-chagrined, half-worried looks. The young fellow approached Fitzroy from behind, tapped him on the shoulder and whispered in his ear. The headmaster glanced at the latest arrivals with a hand raised to his mouth and nodded. He excused himself and, relieved of his burden, crossed the lawn, preening himself as he approached Mr. and Mrs. Jenks. The redheaded boy ushered the other family towards their vehicle with a grace that belied his years.

"Mr. and Mrs. Jenks," said Mr. Fitzroy, "so very sorry to have kept you waiting." He extended his hand. "I just had to get r— I mean— to see the Fredericks off." The two men shook hands.

"Not a problem," replied Mr. Jenks. "If you're not quite done..."

The headmaster glanced towards the Fredericks' car before dismissing the offer. "No, no, young Andrews appears to have everything in hand. Now tell me, how was your trip?"

Emerson's parents exchanged pleasantries with Mr. Fitzroy. Yes, they had enjoyed a safe trip. No, they had had no difficulties finding the school. Yes indeed, the buildings and grounds were lovely.

"I'm so glad to hear you say that," the headmaster said. "First impressions are so very important after all." Fitzroy, conspicuous in his craftiness, stole a glance at his watch. "And Emerson?" he asked.

"Still in the car," replied Mrs. Jenks as she stooped slightly and waved to her son. Some signal must have passed from the headmaster to the students near the stairs, for the tallest boy crossed the lawn, took up a position at Mr. Fitzroy's side, his back turned towards the infantile

antics of his two friends. Nothing but the headmaster's signal escaped Emerson's keen eye.

"While I'm with Emerson," declared Fitzroy, "Meddows here will give you the grand tour. Meddows... Mr. and Mrs. Jenks." The boy shook Peter Jenks' hand. "Mr. Meddows is in fourth year. Right, Meddows?" Meddows confirmed the fact with a slight nod and focussed his eyes on his tasselled loafers. "He'll be happy to show you around. Won't you, Meddows?"

"Pleased to meet you, Ma'am," said Meddows. "And you too, of course, Mr. Jenks, Sir. If you'll follow me, please, we'll start over there in Disraeli Hall." Meddows pointed to his right, drawing the Jenks' attention to the red-brick addition to their left. "I'll show you the gym and auditorium first," the boy explained. "We'll just—"

"Oh, Meddows. Make sure Mr. and Mrs. Jenks get a bite to eat, would you?" called Fitzroy. The station wagon reached, the headmaster opened Emerson's door, stooped down, placing his hands on his knees. "Well now... There you are," he exclaimed. The surprise in his voice suggested that he thought Mrs. Jenks might have lied to him. "Ready for our wee chat, are we, Jenks?"

Emerson slid out of the car, shook Mr. Fitzroy's outstretched hand then followed him up the steps.

The man stopped and shouted. "Meddows! Meddows, I say!"

Meddows stopped, turned and cocked his ear towards the main entrance.

"Make sure you have the Jenkses back to my office by—" Fitzroy drew out his pocket watch and stared at it, "—one o'clock, say. And Meddows..." The headmaster looked around. "Now, where did Andrews get to? I say, Meddows! Remind Andrews to ring the lunch bell at one-fifteen sharp."

"Sir," replied Meddows by way of acknowledgement.

Mrs. Jenks asked about the addition at the opposite end of the old building. Meddows explained that Gladstone Hall housed the faculty. "It's off limits 'less yuh've got— sorry —unless you *have* written permission, Ma'am."

Mrs. Jenks had no real interest in the building and missed Meddows' response. Not even his grammatical gaffe registered with her. Her atten-

tion was fixed on her son as he mounted the stairs. With foreboding, she watched Emerson and Mr. Fitzroy disappear through the school's cavernous front entrance. "My poor little boy," she muttered and stepped into Disraeli Hall followed by her husband. Before Meddows could follow, he heard his name being called yet again.

Mr. Fitzroy had stepped out of the building, followed by Emerson, and shouted, "Meddows! If Mr. Jenks will trust us with his keys—" the man laughed a great horsy laugh, "—have a couple of the fellows haul young Mr. Jenks' things up to the dorm. There's a good lad." As if for the first time, the headmaster noticed Meddows' two companions. He took three or four steps towards the pair and, with a snap of his fingers, said, "Burns and... and... ah..."

"O'Neil," the second boy replied.

"O'Neil," repeated the headmaster. "That's right," he added as if O'Neil's ability to recall his own name was somehow praiseworthy. "You and Burns there, cart this young man's belongings up to the dorm for him." As he spoke he patted Emerson on the shoulder.

"Sir," Burns and O'Neil responded together.

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Mr. Fitzroy, with a hand pressed to the middle of Emerson's back, guided the youngster inside once more. Together, they climbed yet more stairs and passed through a second set of doors into a foyer. Emerson thought the entryway a gloomy affair. The noonday sun, apparently the room's sole source of illumination, penetrated just a few feet inside the building. The air felt heavy and cool. Emerson stopped and, straining his eyes, tried to make out the features of what had to be a spacious, high-ceilinged room. The boy noticed four recessed doors, two on each side wall; all were closed. Ahead, through an archway and across a wide hall was a double doorway through which he could see a row of tall, heavily-draped windows high up on the wall opposite. The floor plan indicated that that doorway led into a chapel. He closed his eyes and breathed deeply. A strange but not unpleasant odour permeated the space.

"What's that smell, Sir?" asked Emerson.

Fitzroy tilted his head back, closed his eyes and drew a deep breath. A seraphic smile formed on the man's lips as he exhaled. "That's the

smell of St. Timothy's," he replied. "That's incense mostly... and beeswax from the candles, of course... and altar wine and years and years of paste wax... hardwood floors, you know. You two'll get used to that smell in a hurry," he added. "Everyone does."

Emerson did not know what the headmaster meant when he used the words 'you two'. He had failed to notice another student standing behind the headmaster in the darkest part of the foyer. The boy stared down at the floor.

"Jenks... Fredericks," stated Fitzroy. "Fredericks... Jenks." The boys acknowledged one another with nods but said nothing. "You'll be classmates— and cubicle-mates, too, if I'm not mistaken," advised the headmaster. Neither boy understood exactly what the man meant by the word 'cubicle'; they soon would.

"What's that say?" asked Fredericks, pointing to the school crest set into the mosaic tile floor.

"You should be able to catch the gist of the thing," replied Fitzroy.

Fredericks shrugged.

"A riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma," exclaimed Emerson and stared up at Mr. Fitzroy, smiling a sly smile.

"An enema?" cried Fredericks with a gasp.

"Enigma!" shrieked the headmaster. He almost added the words 'you dolt' but managed to catch himself. "I suppose, Jenks," he continued, "that it's an enigma of sorts." To Fredericks he said, "Look that word up, Fredericks. Look them both up. Enema— indeed!"

While Fitzroy handed Fredericks his first assignment, Emerson squinted down at St. Timothy's school crest:

SEMPER VIGILATE SOBRIIQUE ESTOTE.

Emerson had seen the words on the cover of the orientation manual and now read them aloud. "Let's see! Hmmm... always vigilant and something... sober?" He looked up.

"Not bad, Jenks" admitted Fitzroy. "It's Latin, of course— from the Bible, you know. Here at St. Timothy's, we've always translated it as *Be forever vigilant and sober.*"

"Really?" replied Emerson. "Vigilant, Sir? *Semper vigilate!* I think I can manage that, Sir."

The headmaster waved towards two of the foyer's four doors. "The

sacristy's on our left and the vestry's to our right," announced Fitzroy. Neither boy was familiar with the word 'sacristy' or 'vestry' either. "And, ahead of us we have our chapel," Fitzroy added with a nod. The headmaster plucked his watch from his waistcoat pocket, brought it close to his face and angled it towards the shaft of sunlight. "My, my, my!" he muttered. "We're running a bit late. Well now, Jenks," he added, "it's time for our wee chat, eh?"

Leaving Fredericks to ponder the motto, the man led Emerson down a dark corridor, through a doorway and onto a stairwell landing. "Chapel landing," Mr. Fitzroy announced as he pushed the chapel door open.

Emerson looked over the pews to the altar. The view confirmed that the chapel had a main aisle and a side aisle which led to the foyer. On the landing, opposite the rear door, stood a life-sized statue set into a deep, raised alcove.

"St. Timothy," explained the headmaster when he noticed how Emerson, apparently awestruck, stared up at the imposing presence.

Emerson eyed the lifelike sculpture, sidled past it and followed Fitzroy upstairs and along a hallway: grey walls, greyer floor, even greyer ceiling. At the end of the hall they turned a corner, continued for another twenty paces and stopped before a set of oak doors. Along the way, Mr. Fitzroy chatted. Emerson only half listened. He did notice, however, that the headmaster was fond of saying that St. Timothy's made men out of boys like him.

Mr. Fitzroy pressed the thumb latches and swung his office doors open. "Go right ahead, Jenks," said the man. "No need to be nervous."

Emerson approached the doorway, stopped on the threshold, screwed up his eyes and peered right and left. Like the rest of the building, the room was poorly lit and filled with shadows.

"Nothing to be afraid of, Jenks," advised Fitzroy. "We just need to run over a few of the ground rules. It shouldn't take more than half an hour."

Emerson's eyes swept the room.

The headmaster smiled ruefully, nodded and stepped past his young guest. "Don't worry, Jenks, your parents won't leave without saying good-bye." Like a tennis player making a backhand lob shot, he waved Emerson forward.

Emerson moved quickly to the centre of the room and turned full circle. A high-backed, red leather chair occupied the space between a large rosewood desk and the room's only window. A small, straight-backed, wooden chair had been positioned at the right side of the desk. Emerson did not have to ask where to sit. Several bookshelves stood against the walls. Armchairs were scattered about the room. There was a single door on the side wall to the left of the desk. When Emerson spotted a small, antique roll-top standing alone in the corner, to his far right, he grinned a gratified grin and stepped forward. He had anticipated finding that desk somewhere in the headmaster's office. So much depended on it being there.

"Sit anywhere you like, Jenks. Make yourself comfortable," Fitzroy stated. He turned and closed the doors.

Emerson moved the small chair to the left side of the desk and took his seat. He sniffed the air and detected the smell of tobacco smoke. In vain, he scanned the room for signs of an ashtray. *He smokes but doesn't want anyone to know*, the boy observed. Emerson figured he should be able to make use of that information at some point.

The headmaster's eyebrows rose when he noticed that his guest had moved the small chair. He muttered, walked across the room and stepped behind the desk. He turned on his desk lamp, fussed with some papers while contemplating the unprecedented turn of events and then took his seat. He clasped his hands together and stretched his arms out over his blotter. "So, Jenks, you want St. Timothy's to make a man out of you, do you?" asked the headmaster.

"A man, Sir? Oh, yes, Sir. I'd like that, Sir," answered Emerson.

Fitzroy was taken aback but nonetheless pleased. "That's just great," he replied. "Well, let's get started, shall we?" The man rubbed the palms of his hands together while Emerson removed his glasses and polished the lenses. From where he sat, he had a clear view past the headmaster to the roll-top desk.

Fitzroy slid his glasses up and down his nose as if he was unsure whether he could see better with or without them. He peered over the top of the frames and droned on about the school's history before beginning to review the rules. "We operate on the honour system here, Jenks," he advised. "That means—" The man stopped in mid-sentence. "Jenks?"

he added with alarm. Emerson did not respond. He slid to the edge of his chair and opened wide his mouth and eyes. He fixed his gaze on the roll-top. Fitzroy glanced into the corner too. "Jenks? Is everything alright?"

"Are there many ghosts here, Sir?" asked the boy without changing expressions.

"Ghosts!" cried Fitzroy and eased himself from his chair. "Of course not, Jenks. There's no such thing as ghosts."

"Then who's that, Sir?" asked Emerson and pointed towards the roll-top.

The headmaster gawked at the old desk. He looked back at his guest and said, "It's just the poor lighting in here... Plays tricks with the eyes, you know."

"I really don't think so, Sir. I can see the old fellow quite clearly," said the boy and got to his feet.

"The— the— the old fellow?" stuttered Fitzroy, exhibiting more interest. He took three or four tentative steps towards the old desk and inspected the corner, but failed to see anything unusual.

"Oh yes, Sir," replied Emerson. "He's right there by that roll-top. Can't you see him, Sir? He's twirling a feather pen around and he's got on a vest with buttons all down the front."

The headmaster staggered backwards, bumping his chair. He had to clutch the edge of the desk for balance. His heart beat faster and rose in his throat at the mention of the pen and the vest. His stare shifted between the corner and the strange boy. Mr. Fitzroy found himself unable to say a word. His mouth, suddenly bone dry, begged for water. In slow-motion, Emerson swivelled his head to his left. The headmaster's eyes followed the boy's gaze until both host and guest stood staring at the single door on the room's side wall. Fitzroy's fingers moved spasmodically as he scratched his clammy palms.

"It's okay now, Sir," announced Emerson. "He's gone. Passed right through that door there."

Fitzroy stood close to his desk with his eyes fixed upon the door.

"You were saying something about the honour system, Sir?" suggested Emerson.

Every year, the headmaster sent orientation manuals to new students. A couple were read from cover to cover. A few were thumbed

through for highlights. Most were glanced at and discarded. But Emerson had read the manual over and over again. He went so far as to examine its photographs under a magnifying glass. That is how he knew about the roll-top and could describe the quill pen and the multi-buttoned vest of St. Timothy's first and long-dead headmaster.

"Ah... yes, Jenks. Yes— as I was saying." Mr. Fitzroy took his seat and cast another long, tentative look at the roll-top. "As I was saying—" another glance into the corner, "—we have an honour system here. Students are..." He took a fleeting look at the door on the side wall. "Students are expected to—"

"Oh, no!" cried Emerson leaping to his feet. He stared at the room's main entrance for several seconds. "Not now, you guys!" he shouted. "We'll be twenty minutes. Half an hour maybe." As Emerson spoke into thin air, Mr. Fitzroy sprang to his feet and stepped behind his chair. He gripped its headrest with both hands. His mouth fell open as the boy continued in conversation with their unseen visitors.

"Okay," Emerson said. "Thank you." He turned, sat and stared into the headmaster's ashen face. "It's alright now, Sir. My friends will come back later."

"Friends?" declared Fitzroy. "These... these... these ghosts are your friends?"

"Yes! Well... I mean no," replied Emerson. "Not exactly, I suppose. You see, Dad likes me to call them 'friends' just so Mom and— well, other people don't get so... well... so all freaked out and stuff." No response from Mr. Fitzroy. "Every time my mother hears the word 'ghost'... well, she breaks down and cries."

"Oh, my," gasped Fitzroy. "Your parents know all about the... the... I mean... about your friends, do they?"

"Oh, of course, they do, Sir. I'd never keep anything like that from my parents, Sir," replied the boy.

"No. I suppose not," continued the headmaster with quick glances at the roll-top and the room's three doors.

"They said they wouldn't bother us again, Sir. My friends, I mean," Emerson added. "I don't know about that old man though." Emerson jerked his thumb towards the door on the side wall. "You were going to tell me about the honour system, Sir." The headmaster's eyes darted

about the room resting on the roll-top, the doors and the boy in turn. "You *are* alright, aren't you, Sir?" Emerson inquired.

"Fine, Jenks... fine," answered Fitzroy who looked anything but fine. "I guess it's just that I've never..." Fitzroy used a manila folder as a fan. "It's just that I've never met anyone who saw... and well... *talked* to ghosts. That's all."

"*Friends*, please, Sir?" begged Emerson. "'Specially 'round my mom, eh?" Emerson paused for a moment to give his message time to sink in. "It came as quite a shock to my parents too," added Emerson. "At first, we found it all but ineffable, Sir."

"Ineffable?" repeated the headmaster. "You know what 'ineffable' means, do you, Jenks?"

"Oh yes, Sir," answered Emerson. "It means—"

"That's okay," Fitzroy interrupted. "I know what 'ineffable' means." The headmaster drew his watch from its pocket. "Oh my," he cried. "It's getting rather late."

The interview lasted longer than planned. Mr. Fitzroy spent an inordinate amount of time glancing into shadowy corners and staring at doors. His train of thought went off the rails several times and he had to back up and restart many of his sentences. Emerson did his best to keep the man on track.

"So, do you have any questions for me, Jenks?" asked Fitzroy, rising as he did so.

"I did, Sir, but... well... my Dad, you know... he told me to ask about the ghosts... Oops, sorry. I mean my friends. We're always supposed to say friends, eh? But I guess... well..." Emerson hesitated.

"I see," interrupted Fitzroy. "Your Dad wanted—" The headmaster moved from behind his desk and the boy leapt to his feet. "Let's just go see if your folks are back yet, shall we, Jenks? I'm eager to talk to your Dad, you see."

"Of course," replied Emerson. "May I ask what's in there, Sir?" he said and nodded towards the single door on the side wall.

"That's just my sleeping room," answered Fitzroy. "Why do you ask?"

Emerson already knew about the headmaster's sleeping room. It was marked on the building's floor plan. At the mention of the sleeping

room, the boy arched his eyebrows and shivered as if a chill had run through his body. "It's just that that's where that old man... Oh, never mind, Sir. It's not important."

Fitzroy's mouth fell open as he stared at his bedroom door. A tingling electric shock raced up and down his spine. Wide-eyed, he watched Emerson cross the room, open the doors and step into the corridor.

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"Well, Emerson, that wasn't so bad, now was it?" asked Mr. Jenks. Without waiting for an answer, he continued. "So then, Headmaster, have you decided to keep him or—" The expression on Fitzroy's face caused Mr. Jenks to stop in mid-sentence.

"Oh, we'll keep him, Sir," replied Fitzroy. "No doubt about that. We've a very bright young man on our hands, Mr. and Mrs. Jenks. Very bright indeed."

Mrs. Jenks smiled a proud smile. "He has a very active imagination too. Emerson's a good boy—a quiet and sensitive boy. You'll not have the slightest trouble with him. Will they, Emerson?"

Emerson gave his mother an evasive shrug.

"Imaginative," repeated Fitzroy with a smile. He nodded towards the boy. "Indeed, indeed! But, time is getting on," he announced and beckoned his guests towards the foyer. Emerson latched onto his father's arm. Mrs. Jenks walked beside the headmaster, her hand resting on his forearm, chatting non-stop all the way to the front entrance. Her captive could not break into her monologue. Mr. Jenks and Emerson followed close behind.

When they reached the main doors, the headmaster finally interrupted Emerson's mother. "Now, Ma'am, Emerson will be just fine. The new boys learn the ropes quickly, Ma'am. You needn't be concerned."

"Emerson has been a bit... well... *preoccupied*, Mr. Fitzroy. Especially today," said the woman. "He's been reading that manual you sent us over and over—"

Emerson tugged on his mother's sleeve. The woman looked down at her son. "What?" she whispered.

"Well, I'm sure that Jenks—Emerson, I should say, will be quite alright, Ma'am," replied the headmaster and beckoned the family outside.

Emerson stood at the head of the stairs as Mr. Fitzroy escorted the two adults to their car. The gentleman opened and closed Mrs. Jenks' door while Mr. Jenks walked to the driver's side of the vehicle. Over the station wagon's roof, Mr. Fitzroy addressed Emerson's father. "Have a safe trip home now. Burns returned your keys, I hope."

Mr. Jenks dangled his keys between his thumb and forefinger. "Oh, Mr. Fitzroy! Did Emerson happen to mention about his friends?" the man asked.

Fitzroy thought Mr. Jenks spoke the word 'friends' more loudly than advisable. A quick glance at a sobbing Mrs. Jenks confirmed his worst fears. He watched the woman hold a handkerchief to her eyes and then blow her nose. The headmaster leaned over the car and, in a conspiratorial whisper, answered, "Yes, he did, Mr. Jenks. Indeed! Yes, his... ah... *friends*..." As he whispered the word 'friends', Fitzroy tapped on the roof of the car above Mrs. Jenks. "I'm not quite sure what to make of them," he added with a wink.

Why the headmaster tapped on the roof and winked remained a mystery to Mr. Jenks who tilted his head to one side and stared. "Make of them?" he repeated at last. "I don't see that there's much to be made of them. Pretty straightforward, don't you think?"

It was the headmaster's turn to stare. "I see," he replied, thoughtfully. "Well... you do seem to take all this in your stride, I see," he added as he massaged his chin. The man's mouth popped open. "Oh, now I see. Ah, perhaps you're right. Downplay the whole thing. Right! Splendid idea! Ignore it, eh? What do you think, Sir?"

"Well," answered Mr. Jenks, "I think..." He decided it was probably best not to say what he was thinking. "I'm sure you know best," he said. "You've had so much more experience with this kind of thing, I suppose."

"Well, sometimes the younger boys have a few little adjustment problems... at first, I mean." Fitzroy caught a glimpse of Mrs. Jenks out of the corner of his eye. She was still weeping. "But these here, ah... these—"

Emerson's father did not let the headmaster finish. "We'll just leave all this in your capable hands. I'm sure you don't want us butting in, eh?"

“Indeed,” answered Fitzroy. “Not that you’d be butting in, of course.” In a whisper he added, “If the problem persists—” another glance at Emerson’s mother, “—we could have him see our doctor.” The headmaster turned to look at Emerson.

“What?” barked Mr. Jenks. “A doctor!”

The headmaster quickly refocused.

Mr. Jenks continued, “I don’t think a doctor will be needed. Do you... really?”

“Well, not right away, of course,” stammered Fitzroy and cleared his throat. “I only meant if this thing... ah... *persists*. As I said... we’ll downplay the whole thing. How will that be?”

Mr. Jenks stared at the ground, scratched the back of his neck and grimaced. “Downplay it,” he repeated. “I guess.” To avoid further eye contact with the headmaster he inspected the interior of the station wagon. “Emerson!” he exclaimed. “They forgot your guitar.”

The boy started down the stairs.

“Oh, I’ll take that off your hands, Sir,” Fitzroy said and stepped around the back of the car. The two men shook hands one last time as the headmaster took possession of the instrument.

Mr. Jenks climbed into the station wagon, started the engine and let the car roll back so his wife could wave to their son. Mrs. Jenks rolled down her window as Emerson hurried down the steps to give her a hug and a peck on the cheek. The station wagon started forward.

“Bye, Mom! Bye, Dad! See you at Thanksgiving,” Emerson shouted and waved wildly as the car rounded the circular drive and started down the lane. The handkerchief Mrs. Jenks had been using to dry her tears fluttered as she held it out the window. Emerson and the headmaster watched as the vehicle turned onto the highway. Neither of them looked away until the flapping handkerchief disappeared from view.

Headmaster Fitzroy tried to hand the guitar to Emerson. Emerson ignored the effort. Fitzroy drew his watch from his waistcoat and moaned, “Oh, my, I’m late. We’ll talk again soon, Jenks.” Again, he held the guitar case out towards the boy.

Emerson pointed to Disraeli Hall and asked about the building. Fitzroy gave a brief explanation, turned and started off towards the stairs. To further delay the man’s escape, Emerson asked the same question

about Gladstone Hall. "Mr. Fitzroy, whose room is that, Sir?" Emerson pointed up at the faculty wing.

Fitzroy followed the boy's gaze and noticed a venetian blind swaying in a window. "That's Professor Warneke's lodgings, Jenks. Why do you ask?"

"I thought I saw a man watching us from up there, Sir. That's all," answered Emerson.

"Yes... well, that's quite possible, Jenks," replied the headmaster. "Professor Warneke arrived last night."

Emerson took another long, lingering look at Professor Warneke's window. For a moment, a man's face appeared. It was not the same face Emerson had noticed earlier. It was the face of a younger, shorter, thinner man. The boy's eyes met those of the stranger. It was not Emerson who looked away first.

Emerson finally took possession of his guitar and then watched as the headmaster jogged up the long flight of stairs, shaking his head, consulting his pocket watch and mumbling. The boy listened as the man lamented the lateness of the hour. The White Rabbit, thought Emerson and shook his head as Mr. Fitzroy disappeared into the building.

Emerson carried his guitar towards the footballers who continued running helter-skelter upon the lawn. He stopped and began watching the game. The boy failed to see Mr. Fitzroy return to the main entrance and peek out. The man rolled his lower lip between his thumb and index finger. "I'll have to keep an eye on that one," he muttered.

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Emerson had no interest in football. As he watched the game, he concentrated on his first meeting with the headmaster and mused about what pranks might flow from it. He did not hear footsteps approaching.

"Jenks!" demanded Meddows. Emerson turned and stared up into the boy's face, then leaned to one side and glanced past him and, as expected, saw Burns and O'Neil standing well back, elbowing each other and tittering. Without a word, Emerson turned his attention back to the game.

"I'm Meddows," announced Meddows. "And I'm a senior."

Emerson refused to look at the older boy. “Good for you, Meddows,” he replied.

“I said... I’m a *senior*, Jenks,” repeated Meddows. He assumed the tone of a doctor who has been mistaken for an orderly.

“So?” said Emerson.

“So!” cried Meddows. “So?” He looked towards his toadies and shrugged, as if he wanted them to confirm that he had heard correctly.

“Sorry... I guess I should’ve said, *so what*,” added Emerson.

“Ah! I get it. We’ve got ourselves a smartass, guys,” declared Meddows and looked back over his shoulder. “I guess somebody needs an attitude adjustment, eh? Whatcha think?” The stooges snorted and grinned in response. “You’re makin’ a very bad first impression, Jenks. I guess we’re gunna have tuh teach yuh some manners,” threatened Meddows.

“Is this where I’m supposed to act scared?” asked Emerson, calmly, without taking his eyes off the game.

“If yuh ain’t scared now, you’re soon gunna be,” growled Meddows. Before the boy finished speaking, a bell sounded. Its echo had not died away before the football players disappeared inside. Emerson moved towards the main doors with Meddows and his toadies close on his heels. “So you play guitar, do you, Jenks?” asked Meddows.

Emerson stopped. Meddows stopped. The toadies stopped. Emerson looked down at his guitar case and then back at Meddows. “Good guess, Meddows... but it’s a tuba.”

While Meddows tried to stifle his friends’ inane laughter, Emerson skipped up the stairs and re-entered St. Timothy’s. The Meddows Gang chatted before dashing into the foyer. As the three boys passed, Emerson, who stood, shrouded in deep shadow, addressed them.

“Hey! I guess we got off to a rough start, eh, guys?” The three senior students came up short. “Sorry...” continued the new boy, “guess I should’ve said it’s a tuba... *Meddows*.”

Without a word the older boys entered the chapel.

Thus began prankster Emerson Jenks’ new life at St. Timothy’s.

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Mrs. Jenks remained uncharacteristically quiet during the first hour of

the drive home. She had stopped crying soon after St. Timothy's dropped from view, but she had not stopped worrying about her son.

Mr. Jenks' mind occupied itself with the headmaster's bizarre behaviour. "Did you happen to notice anything different... anything sort of weird, I mean... about Mr. Fitzroy?" he asked his wife. The woman pondered her husband's question. "I mean... after Emerson's interview."

"No, I don't think so," replied Mrs. Jenks. "Why?"

"Well... he thinks Emerson missing his friends is a problem or something," said her husband. "And a serious one too."

"Really?" Mrs. Jenks spoke with more than a hint of astonishment in her voice.

"Really," repeated Mr. Jenks. "I'm serious. At one point there he even suggested that their doctor talk to the boy."

"Doctor!" cried Emerson's mother.

"Well, that's what I've been wondering about," admitted Mr. Jenks. "You'd think Emerson was the first kid who ever showed up there missing his friends or something."

"That's only natural, isn't it, Honey?" asked Mrs. Jenks. "Missing his friends, I mean."

"Why, of course, it is. And that's what surprises me," replied her husband.

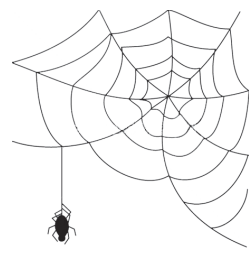
"Well... maybe they're just being extra careful?" mumbled Mrs. Jenks. "But a doctor? Really!"

Mr. Jenks concentrated on the highway. From time to time, he frowned and shrugged. Mrs. Jenks pressed her pillow against the side window and rested her head on it. Peter Jenks listened to his wife's breathing grow shallow and more regular. He peeked at her several times. Her eyes remained closed. He continued to think about his day. "That thing with the sign... now that was really weird," he mumbled.

His wife sighed. "Probably just some stupid kid horsing around, Hon," suggested Mrs. Jenks without opening her eyes. "You know how bold some kids can be nowadays."

"You're probably right," replied Mr. Jenks and sighed too. "But what I'd really like to know is why they keep picking on us."

# Temporary Accommodations



The young man made a valiant effort at stifling a yawn. He massaged the back of his neck and grimaced as his eyes wandered about his new room, coming to rest on the bed. “Like a rock!” he grumbled.

He stooped down and slid his hand under the mattress, probing for the solid boards that he knew must lie beneath. He discovered only a board-hard box spring. An unsatisfactory first night’s sleep had followed the previous day’s tedious train ride. The mattress and incessant snoring – not his own – had conspired to rob him of a decent night’s sleep. He frowned at an older man – the snorer – who stood looking out the window.

“Tell me, Sir...” asked the young man, “how long have you taught here?”

This question, like every other he had asked since rising, went unanswered. The gentleman to whom he spoke, an imposing figure at six-foot-four and 280 pounds, filled one of the room’s two windows. He stared out towards the school’s front entrance, silent and motionless, save for his fingers with which he twisted and twirled the ends of his great, bushy, white moustache.

The young man walked to the room’s other window and cautiously raised the blind. Lush, green foliage brushing the windowpanes blocked his view. He lowered the blind, strolled across the room and inspected his reflection in a full-length mirror. His loafers gleamed. The creases in his slacks were crisp. His powder blue sweater vest and white shirt were spotless. He adjusted his tie, nodded his satisfaction, removed a navy blue blazer from his closet and began giving it a thorough brushing. This flurry of activity failed to distract him from wondering what he could have done to offend his new roommate.

At the window, the older man rocked on the balls of his feet, shook his head and grumbled. He wore a tired-looking, double-breasted suit. Its jacket, for want of buttons, hung open displaying a well-worn waistcoat.

His trousers, clearly not the suit's better half, were more ragged still. The ensemble possessed a slept-in look, wrinkled and stained with frayed cuffs. His shoes could not recall their last polishing. In every respect, the older man was his roommate's opposite number.

St. Timothy's newest teacher was younger, shorter and thinner. He was meek and mild-mannered – many would describe him as naïve. His attire was immaculate. He cut a fine figure, well turned-out and impeccably groomed. Nobody would describe the older fellow as meek or mild, and certainly not naïve. At a single glance anyone would conclude that he was anything but clean-cut.

"Sir?" stammered the younger man – he avoided looking at his companion. "I was hoping... I mean you said... ahem... you'd give me... well... a few pointers. You know, I've never taught before."

There was no response.

"I'd appreciate..."

The older gentleman released the blind which banged against the glass and casement before striking the sill. The chaotic clatter and crash rattled the younger man's nerves.

"Humph, indeed!" grumbled the older man. "The very idea!" He crossed to the door, pressed his back to the wall and paced the room's width, counting as he went, "Six, nine, twelve and fifteen... at most." He repeated the exercise, estimating the room's length, and elbowed past his mesmerized roommate with no hint of apology. "Twenty... maybe twenty-one," he grumbled. "Listen here, Whittingly-Wendles," he continued, "this just won't do. Why... the very idea, Sir!"

The smaller man looked about. "The room, Sir?" he asked. "Oh, it seems plenty big, Sir."

"Plenty big?" exclaimed his companion. "What on earth do you mean? The place is a hovel, Sir. Humph! If you think this is in any way workable, Sir, well then—"

"But, Sir—"

"Listen to me, Whallaby-Whattles," the older gentleman butted in, "this room's not meant for two. Can't you see that, Sir? Is that not perfectly clear?"

"In university..." The man addressed as Whallaby-Whattles decided

not to describe the tiny room he had shared in residence. His inner voice warned him not to argue with someone in such a blustery mood.

"Humph! Just because you're the new man, they've no right to shove you into this... this closet." The big man returned to the window and gave the blind cords a mighty tug. The slats clicked and clacked together. "Look at that sorry scene, would you, Sir?" he demanded. "They get grubbier every year."

The young man approached the window but his roommate's bulk blocked his view.

"Do you believe in karma, Whelderby-Whittles? Or reincarnation and all that? Do you think we're being punished for sins from our former lives? Hmmm! Well?" The big man turned to face his roommate.

The young man was not Whittingly-Wendles nor Whallaby-Whattles nor even Whelderly-Whittles. The dapper fellow was Probationary Professor Wilfred Willoughby-Wallows, M.A. (*summa cum laude*). He was St. Timothy's newly appointed Greek and Latin man.

His roommate, Cyrus Warneke, tugged on the ends of his moustache and continued his rant. "If there's any truth in that eastern nonsense we must have done some evil deeds." The big man licked his fingertips and vainly attempted to get his bushy eyebrows to lie flat. "I can't imagine what evils I could have done. Perhaps I was Attila the Hun or one of those Caesars. Ah! To deserve such a fate!" Warneke finished by solemnly pronouncing, "This school would be such a fine place... if it weren't for all the blasted children running about!"

Wilfred Willoughby-Wallows could not answer. Stunned, he stared at Warneke and tried to determine if the man was mad. Then his face lit up. "Oh, I get it, Sir," he cried out and then laughed. "You're pulling my leg, Sir, teasing the new fellow. Well—"

"—I am not pulling your leg, Whitterly-Whar... oh, drat," he said. "They're devils, Sir. Demons and golems. You'll be of the same opinion inside a week. You and your romantic, naïve notions about our high calling! I still say we're being punished." Warneke returned to the window. Looking back over his shoulder he added, "You'll find that what Mr. Dickens said about—" he hesitated, frowned, cleared his throat and continued, "—about some place or other, I can't recall exactly where at

the moment. Anyway, what he said fits this place to a tee: a fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in... Or something like that.”

Some are drawn to teaching by a love for learning. Some are motivated by concern for the malleable minds of children. Some, recalling the generosity of their own teachers, enter the classroom intent on inspiring excellence. Cyrus Warneke paid dues to none of these groups. Cyrus Warneke’s parents had threatened to separate their only son from a generous allowance if he refused to make something of his life. Their words of warning drove him into Engineering, but in short order, he convinced his teachers he had neither interest in, nor talent for, buildings, bridges and the like. Besides playing whist and listening to classical music, his only interest had been reading. He transferred to the English Department and, without much effort, graduated top of his class – the man lacked industry not intelligence. Directly out of university, Cyrus Warneke installed himself at St. Timothy’s.

Warneke removed a razor from his medicine cabinet, walked to the door and opened it. He stopped and stared at his roommate. The big man grunted, shook his head, stepped into the corridor and closed the door behind him.

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Willoughby-Wallows strolled to the window. He observed the footballers, then watched parents and students standing about on the lawn. His attention was drawn to a maroon station wagon which rolled up the drive and parked. A man and a woman exited the vehicle. Willoughby-Wallows checked the time: 11:57. Bored, he used the heel-to-toe method to pace off the room’s length and breadth. On discovering its true dimensions – 20 by 28 feet, he muttered aloud – his eyes fixed upon the door through which his roommate had disappeared. He scratched his head, half amazed... half amused.

Noticing that the door to Warneke’s medicine cabinet had been left ajar, Willoughby-Wallows approached it, glanced over his shoulder, opened the mirrored door and peeked inside. The shelves were chock-a-block with shampoo. Willoughby-Wallows had never dreamed of there being such a collection outside a beauty salon. Such variety! He returned the door to its original position, walked to his desk, picked up a

book, sat on the edge of his bed and began to read aloud: "*It is incumbent upon the newcomer to establish and maintain positive working relationships with his fellows.*" Willoughby-Wallows read the words and laughed aloud. "Incumbent upon? Positive relationships?" he said aloud. The Greek and Latin teacher checked the book's title: *Tips for Teachers – Everything you need to know before entering the classroom*. Willoughby-Wallows' mother had given him the book in celebration of his first teaching job. He tossed the volume on the desk and fixed his eyes on his bed. The pillow appeared exceedingly enticing and reminded him of just how exhausted he felt. He kicked off his shoes and stretched out on the covers. Inexplicably, the mattress seemed softer than he remembered. He closed his eyes and events of the previous eighteen hours began to dash and dance about in his head.

He recalled meeting Warneke at the train station in Montreal. The gentleman said little on the trip. In fact, thinking about it, Willoughby-Wallows realized he had been snubbed. From the station, they shared a silent cab ride to St. Timothy's. The young man bristled as he recalled how, on their arrival, Warneke had leapt from the taxi and jogged up the front steps, shouting, '*Right-oh, pay the man, won't you, Son.*' He recalled how the headmaster had seemed nervous when explaining that the two men would be bunking together. He recalled how, shortly thereafter, Warneke had transformed himself and talked on and on. Willoughby-Wallows recalled that the big man had even ignored his requests for directions to their room. Willoughby-Wallows thought about how the English master offered to show him the ropes and demanded details about his studies and his tastes in food, music and literature. It was 2:15 in the morning before the young man finally felt his head sink into his pillow. These thoughts and more traipsed through Willoughby-Wallows' mind as he hovered somewhere between wakefulness and sleep.

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"No, no, no!" shouted Warneke upon re-entering the room. He placed a foot on the edge of Willoughby-Wallows' bed and shook him awake. "No *siestas* here, Sir. We're not on the Mediterranean, Waverly—I mean, Sir."

Willoughby-Wallows rolled off the bed and onto his feet. "What—what is it, Sir?" he asked groggily as he patted his hair into place.

"Sleeping in the middle of the day, Sir," the English master added, "is the worst of bad habits! Don't you know that? It's such a waste of time and a sure sign of sloth. We frown on sloth here, Sir. Don't want to start off on the wrong foot now, do you, Sir?"

As Warneke applied copious amounts of cheap *eau-de-cologne*, Willoughby-Wallows wandered over to the window. He watched as two young men removed suitcases from the station wagon and carried them into the building. "Sir, is there any way to tell the newcomers from the... the... returners?"

*He has a Master's degree, the nincompoop, and he lets a word like 'returners' cross his lips,* thought Warneke. To Willoughby-Wallows he replied, "That's easy, my dear fellow. Just look..." Warneke tapped the corner of his eye. "And listen..." He pinched the lobe of an oversized ear and pulled it away from his head. "There's nothing like looking and listening, Wallerly-Willers."

"Willoughby-Wallows, Sir," the younger man said.

"Pardon?" said Warneke.

"Willoughby-Wallows, Sir! Wouldn't it be easier if you just called me Wilfred... or Wilf, Sir?"

"*Wilfred!*" exclaimed Warneke. He stared open-mouthed at his companion. Had Willoughby-Wallows suggested that he be called Napoleon, Warneke could not have acted more shocked. The older man rolled his eyes and then narrowed them, conveying disbelief and utter disdain. "Wilf!" A hint of derision entered his voice. "Never!" he cried. "That will never do. Informality, Sir, leads to familiarity and familiarity breeds contempt, you know. We frown on contempt here at St. Timothy's." If Willoughby-Wallows hoped Warneke had finished his dissertation on the use of first names, his hopes were soon dashed. Warneke had stopped only to draw breath. "My name's Warneke... here in the lodgings and in the refectory, I mean," the big man continued. "When students are around you must say Professor Warneke or just plain Professor or something like that. Shows respect! Understand? These ruffians need to learn some respect. And if we don't teach them... why... who will?"

Willoughby-Wallows caught himself staring, then flushed and looked away.

“Wilfred? Wilf? Lord help us,” exclaimed Warneke. “And you’re Whitterly— oh drat. What is it with these silly hyphenated names?” asked the big man. “I don’t get it. I can’t see the sense in having two last names. What, was your father a Wallows and your mother a Willoughby or something? One of those suffragettes, I warrant.”

“*Suffragettes?*” cried Willoughby-Wallows. “What is that supposed to mean?” Before the word ‘mean’ crossed his lips, the young man regretted the remark. His mind hearkened back to *Tips for Teachers*. He glanced at Warneke and decided that the man had taken no offence and that his rant had run its course. Willoughby-Wallows tried to introduce a more agreeable topic. “Actually, Sir,” he advised, “my mother was a Stanley-Jones from—”

“—Lord, love a duck!” cried Warneke and raised a hand to his forehead. “I don’t recall asking for the family history, Sir. Or perhaps I’m mistaken?”

Willoughby-Wallows averted his eyes, shuffled to the window and gazed out over the grounds. A few of the football players, some of those playing tag and all the adults had disappeared. Of the several vehicles there earlier, only the maroon station wagon remained. The scene cast a spell on the young man. His eyelids grew heavy and his mind began to wander. He flinched when he felt a hand on his shoulder. Warneke tugged his roommate off balance, spun him around and pushed him to the centre of the room. Willoughby-Wallows had to flail his arms about, windmill fashion, to maintain his balance.

The big man’s body once more filled the space before the window. He clasped his hands behind his back and stared outside. Less than a minute later, he jerked the blind’s cords and lowered the shade. “Light’s bothering my eyes,” he complained. “Oh, while it’s fresh in my mind...” Cyrus Warneke marched to Willoughby-Wallows’ dresser, picked up his clock, opened the top drawer and stuffed the alarm under a stack of neatly folded underwear. “You woke me with that blasted contraption this morning, you know?” he grumbled. “And the ticking nearly drove me insane.”

A pair of Willoughby-Wallows’ underwear peeked at him from the

corner of his dresser drawer. The new teacher had never met anyone who behaved so badly. "You self-centred, old curmudgeon," Willoughby-Wallows muttered as he rearranged his belongings.

"What was that?" asked Warneke over his shoulder.

"I said, *sorry, Sir! Won't let it happen again, Sir.*"

"Ah... I should certainly hope not," replied Warneke. He returned to the window, inserted his hands between two slats and pulled them apart. He peeked out through the diamond-shaped gap. "Not a parent in sight," he reported. "But, little wonder, I suppose. I'm not a parent myself, understand, but after you pound the rudiments of the language into so many hard heads for so long, you can see why their mummies and daddies gallop off into the sunset, *toot-swit* as the Frenchies say, after pawning their boys off on us."

Willoughby-Wallows had stopped listening. He read his book, wondering if he would find anything relevant therein.

Warneke glanced over his shoulder. "Wantingly-Wardles!" he cried. "Would you pay attention, Sir... please? I'm trying to teach you something. If you don't want my help just say so."

Willoughby-Wallows stood, closed *Tips for Teachers* and studied its spine and back cover, thinking he may have missed something of value there. He prepared to drop the book on his desk but worried about what Warneke might say about the bang. The young man tucked the book under his arm and struggled to hear his roommate's description of activities on the lawn. He tilted his head to one side and shook it. It felt as if his ears were stuffed full of cotton batten.

"The wild savages have returned," announced Warneke. "I thought we might be spared their screeching for the rest of the day... But alas, it's not to be. They call that game *Run Sheep Run* by the way."

"Uh huh," mumbled Willoughby-Wallows absentmindedly. He had abandoned all hope of seeing what Warneke was talking about and taken a seat.

"And the ruffians with the football... Why they've not been relegated to the sports field I have no idea," added the English master. "Our headmaster can't handle the boys, you know. Spoils them with kindness, Whittingly..."

"Uh huh."

“Just look at them tear about. Too bad all that energy can’t be put to better use,” moaned Warneke. “Truly, youth is wasted on the young.”

“Uh huh,” muttered Willoughby-Wallows.

“Oh, Lord,” exclaimed Warneke, “more football players. And how they’re dressed? You’d think they feared embarrassing any vagrants hanging ’round the place. Those are the *returners* as you call them.”

The English master turned and found Willoughby-Wallows fast asleep. The young man’s left arm rested on his lap. The other hung over the armrest, almost touching the carpet. His head had rolled to one side. Warneke picked *Tips for Teachers* from the floor and read the title. He chuckled and slipped the book into his jacket pocket. Smiling, he rubbed his palms together. His plan was working better than he had hoped.

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Ten minutes later, Warneke used *Tips for Teachers* to slap his roommate on the sole of a shoeless foot.

“What...” shouted the younger man as he sat bolt upright in his chair.

“You must try to get to bed earlier,” Warneke cautioned and dropped the book into his companion’s lap. “You won’t get to nap around here once classes start.”

Willoughby-Wallows stretched and yawned. He felt woozy and not at all well.

Warneke returned to the window and drew back the blind. “I thought I should wake you so you could freshen up before the meeting. The bell’s going to ring in...” The English master plucked a pocket watch the size of a hockey puck from his waistcoat pocket and stared at it. “You have about ten minutes,” he added.

“Oh, thank you, Sir,” replied Willoughby-Wallows. “I appreciate that, Sir.” The young man ran a comb through his hair, straightened his tie and popped a breath mint into his mouth. With a dismissive wave and a gruff ‘bah’, Warneke declined the candy Willoughby-Wallows offered him. He turned back to the window.

“Now what the heck’s going on down there?” exclaimed Warneke. “I thought all the parents had cleared out already.”

“What’s happening?” The young man’s curiosity had gotten the better of him.

“Our fearless leader’s down there talking to some fellow over the roof of that big old boat. Oh, and there’s little Winthrop or Perceval... some double-barrelled name no doubt, too big for the kid I’ll warrant. He’s standing on the stairs taking in the show... Harold Lloyd glasses and all.” Warneke began to laugh. “They look like two double-O-sevens plotting a caper.” He laughed again. Willoughby-Wallows tried in vain to squeeze between the English master and the casement. Warneke made no effort to accommodate him.

“Now what?” groaned Warneke. “Oh Lordy, the kid’s brought a guitar. If I have to listen to one more pathetic rendition of *Kumbayah*, I’ll go mad. Drooling down my chin mad, I tell you.” The English master turned his head towards his roommate and added, “To survive here, without getting ulcers I mean— pay attention, Wibbilly-Wobbilly—you must always remember what the great man said. Old G.K. once wrote that one must keep one’s temper in this madhouse.”

Willoughby-Wallows knit his brow and fixed a puzzled stare on the big man’s face.

“You’ve never read Chesterton, I see,” Warneke muttered in a clearly disapproving manner. “Ah well... more’s the pity.” He turned and gazed out the window.

“Well, there they go,” Warneke reported. “The last of them have hit the road. Mommy’s waving a hanky the size of a flag out the window.” Warneke checked the time again. “The headmaster’s desperate. Our silly meeting’s in less than five minutes and the kid’s holding him up. Oh my, my, my... that young lad’s doing it on purpose. By golly! He’s having the old man on. Well, I never...”

Warneke let the blind drop. It clattered onto the sill as he turned his back to the window and walked away. Willoughby-Wallows and the professor became entangled as they tried to two-step around each other. The younger man started right as Warneke, ignoring traffic flow convention, headed left. Willoughby-Wallows zigged back just as Warneke zagged in front of him.

“May I have this dance?” cried the English master and grabbed his

companion by the elbow. He shoved Willoughby-Wallows to one side and squeezed past.

The young man made his way to the window and raised the blind. He peered down onto the lawn. His eyes met those of a young, rather undersized boy. The youngster was dressed in the school's blues and greys and wore round, black-rimmed glasses. The way in which the youngster stared up at the window without blinking caused Willoughby-Wallows to avert his eyes and back away. He felt as if he had been slapped.

"Well, it's time we were off," announced Warneke and moved towards the door. Willoughby-Wallows stepped into his loafers and grabbed his coat. He tried slipping into his jacket with *Tips for Teachers* in his hand. This manoeuvre proved more difficult than expected. As he looked back to see why his arm could not locate the jacket's sleeve hole he ran full into Warneke.

"Careful there, Son," exclaimed the older man.

"Sorry, Sir." Willoughby-Wallows made a last-minute wardrobe adjustment. "Shouldn't we be going, Sir?"

Warneke stood with one hand on the doorknob and, with the other, scratched his chin. His eyes surveyed the room.

"Is there a problem, Sir?" inquired Willoughby-Wallows.

"Oh, it's nothing," answered Warneke.

"No, Sir. What's the matter, Sir?" insisted the new professor. He scanned the room, but he had no idea why.

The English master hesitated. "I was just reconsidering... about the size of this room and all. You know... I might have overreacted a bit."

Willoughby-Wallows nodded. "I have to agree with you there, Sir. We'll be very cozy in here. It's a nice big room and comfortable too. Even for the two of us. Besides, Sir, this might only be my temporary accommodations anyways."

"Temporary? Ah, perhaps, my boy, perhaps," Warneke said with a slight sigh. He licked his finger and scratched a bit of breakfast from his lapel, then turned and opened the door.

"And now that you've been kind enough to tell me about my alarm clock—" Willoughby-Wallows coughed "—you'll hardly know I'm here, Sir."

"Indeed, indeed," Warneke replied, laughing. "I'm quite sure you're right about that too, my young friend."

The two men stepped into the hall. Willoughby-Wallows started down the corridor but stopped when he realized he was unaccompanied. He turned and watched as his roommate tugged on a long, heavy chain until a brass key popped out of his pants pocket. Warneke stooped and inserted the key into the door lock.

"Oh, don't lock it, please, Sir," pleaded Willoughby-Wallows. "I don't have my own key yet, Sir, and I won't be able to get back in."

"That is a problem," Warneke replied as he locked the door. He rattled the knob, stuffed the key into his pocket and added, "We'll solve each little difficulty as it comes along, eh? But anytime you need my key—" he patted his pocket, "—you only need to ask."

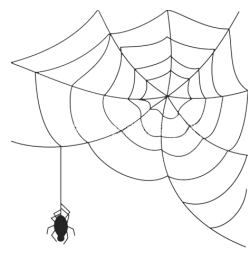
Willoughby-Wallows stood motionless. Warneke placed a huge hand on his companion's slender shoulder, spun him around and, with a hand on the small of his back, hustled him off down the hall. "Our esteemed colleagues await us," declared Warneke. "Let us not disappoint. You'll find this meeting... well... *educational*, I suppose."

As the two men reached the entrance to the main building, a bell sounded.

"We need to hurry, Whittleby-Winslow," advised the English master. "It wouldn't look good, our being late for the first meeting of the year, now would it?"

Like a shore tender tied to a frigate, Wilfred Willoughby-Wallows shuffled along in Cyrus Warneke's wake as the older gentleman hurried down the stairs and through the basement corridor towards the school's auditorium.

# Meetings, Bloody Meetings



Warneke kicked a doorstop into place and ushered Willoughby-Wallows into the auditorium with a salaam, saying, “After you, my esteemed young friend.”

Willoughby-Wallows entered the room, sniffed the air and frowned. A dank, musty odour permeated the space.

“Well, how ’bout that? First ones here,” announced Warneke.

An otherworldly voice sounded out of the gloom. “Not quite, Gentlemen.”

Willoughby-Wallows peered into the darkness, but saw no one.

“Good day, Professors,” the disembodied voice greeted the men.

“*Goo-tun-tog* to you, too,” grumbled the English master.

“And you,” the voice continued, “must be our new Greek and Latin man.”

Before Willoughby-Wallows could reply, Warneke dragged him into a corner, just back of the door. “Baumgartner!” he explained. “Von Baumgartner, the old geezer insists. German master... been here forever.”

The two men looked up as the fluorescent tubes hummed and flashed before filling the room with light. Two men had entered.

“Just you watch this, Waggly— I mean, Sir,” continued Warneke. “Sheep, I say! I could tell you where they’ll sit. Pathetically predictable, my boy. Every last one of them.”

Willoughby-Wallows watched the two gentlemen arrange chairs as others arrived. Many, upon entering the room, peeked behind the door and acknowledged Warneke, almost as if they expected to find him there.

“Fong, Smithers... Jim,” Warneke greeted his fellows.

Willoughby-Wallows stared at the professor.

“What?” the big man asked. He sounded indignant.

“Jim?” asked Willoughby-Wallows. “I thought—”

“—Yes, I know. But that’s Professor Darling. Just think how that would sound,” growled the English master. As if imitating a play-by-play announcer, he continued, “Now just watch how most of them huddle together along the aisle, halfway down. They want to *appear* engaged without actually getting dragged into all the nonsense. Now, Baumgartner there and Bent—”

“—Von Baumgartner, is it not, Sir?” suggested Willoughby-Wallows.

“Listen and learn, would you, Sir,” Warneke cried. “Von Baumgartner, indeed! That makes me what then, *the Earl of Essex*? Now, where was I? Baumgartner and Bentley like to sit off by themselves. They just want to get back to whatever arcane pursuits fill their dreary little lives. Oh! And just wait ’til you see the shepherd of the sheep in action, Sir!”

Willoughby-Wallows had stopped listening when, to his surprise, a woman entered the auditorium, walked to the front of the room and began assembling a flip chart near the stage. The lady was tall and slender. Her jet-black hair was pulled back, rolled up in a tight bun and, seemingly defying gravity, clung to the back of her scrawny neck. Under a red bolero vest, she wore a white blouse with lace trimmed collar and cuffs. A pencil-thin, white belt held up her black skirt. The skirt had no pleats and fell to her ankles. The woman, true to type, wore sensible shoes.

“Who’s the young lady?” asked Willoughby-Wallows.

“*Young lady!*” cried Warneke and coughed. His face registered amazement. “Young lady? Why, Sir, I had no idea you possessed so droll a sense of humour. My boy, that withered old stick is Miss – or should I say Missed – Leticia Strupples.” Warneke observed Willoughby-Wallows observing the woman. “Remind you of anyone?” the older man asked.

“Pardon, Sir?”

“Strupples,” answered Warneke. “She doesn’t remind you of anyone?”

Willoughby-Wallows hesitated. Warneke’s manner suggested he should be able to see a resemblance to someone famous. “I can’t really say she does, Sir.”

“Behind her back,” explained Warneke, “the students call her *Olive Oyl*. But she’s much skinnier than Popeye’s beanpole of a girlfriend. We’re in for some free entertainment, my boy. *Young lady!*” Warneke

elbowed the new teacher in the ribs. "Ha, ha, young lady! That's a good one!"

Just then, the headmaster entered the auditorium, closed the door and, while proceeding to the stage, called for order.

"Oh, Captain, my captain," whispered the English master. "It's show time, my boy." Warneke checked his watch and crossed his arms over his chest. "And only twelve minutes late," he added.

"Ahem! Welcome back everyone. Welcome back," shouted Warneke's shepherd of the sheep. "Let's get started, people. Professor Warneke and Mister... Mister..." began Fitzroy and rummaged through his notes.

"Willoughby-Wallows, Sir," the new teacher declared. He stepped forward, bobbed his head and raised his hand. He resembled a prize-fighter being introduced in the ring. He felt like a schoolboy asking to use the toilet.

"Of course," continued Fitzroy and shuffled his papers. "I... I..."

Strupples rose, clapped her hands and shouted, "Come now, Gentlemen. That's no way to greet our new colleague!"

"I told you, boy, free entertainment," croaked Warneke. "Here we go."

"Sir," continued the lady, addressing Willoughby-Wallows, "please tell us about yourself. Everyone's just dying to hear."

"Pray be brief," whispered Warneke to his blushing companion.

Willoughby-Wallows blundered through an impromptu autobiography.

"Five minutes well spent," complained Warneke when his companion retreated to the corner. "I said, be brief."

"Thank you for that, Sir," responded Fitzroy. With a flourish, he stroked the first item from his agenda and, lowering his head, levelled an icy stare over his glasses towards Strupples. "I guess you beat me to the punch," he added.

The woman mumbled what may have been an apology.

The headmaster paused to consult his notes. "Mr. Willoughby-Wallows. Yes, yes!" he added. "Here it is. Well, then, let's continue." He eyed the flip chart and turned back to Strupples. "We— all of us I mean— shall try to keep this meeting short and snappy."

“Amazing,” whispered Warneke, “how in trying to be short and snappy that man can speed through a thirty-minute meeting in a mere three hours.”

“Professor Warneke!” cried the headmaster. His words came out sharp and half a pitch too high. “Please take your seat.” He beckoned. “Professor and... and... Mr. Wing... and your friend too... come.”

Willoughby-Wallows started forward, but, to his amazement, felt himself yanked backwards. Warneke had a firm grip on his collar.

“No, no, we’re quite comfortable right here,” shouted the English master. “Carry on, Sir, I beg of you. Proceed! Bad back, you know...” The man’s voice trailed off.

Fitzroy stared at Warneke, inhaled deeply and puffed out his chest. He clamped a hand on either side of the lectern, leaned forward and thrust his chin in the English master’s direction. Stony-faced, Warneke stared back. Willoughby-Wallows’ face turned crimson and he wished he had never met the big man. Like gunfighters in the old west, Fitzroy and Warneke faced off across the room. Like frightened townsfolk, the audience hunkered down in anticipation of a shootout. Willoughby-Wallows worried that he might be in the line of fire. Fitzroy had a bad habit of avoiding eye contact. Without considering the consequences, he glanced down at his notes.

“Check and mate,” muttered Warneke for Willoughby-Wallows’ benefit.

Eager to re-engage, the headmaster looked up, but the showdown was over. Fitzroy realized he was a beaten man. “Well, where was I?” asked the headmaster and, after a short pause, he began rattling off teaching and non-teaching assignments. Before he revealed the job he planned to award to Warneke, he faltered, and balked. “Professor Warneke... ahem... I have you down for... um... dormitory supervisor.” Fitzroy stiffened.

Staff members looked either down at the floor or up at the ceiling. Some examined their nails and engaged in discrete whistling. The silence grew awkward in the extreme. Warneke said nothing. Fitzroy said nothing. Willoughby-Wallows said nothing but shivered when he felt a chill spread throughout the room. Strupples turned and stared at the English master.

“Well, then...” Fitzroy continued. He sighed with relief. “That’s that, I guess. But before we have tea, I’d just like to say...” The headmaster rambled on about the teacher’s high calling and, in doing so, referred to the newly revised Policy Manual.

Strupples assumed that his mention of the Policy Manual was her cue to usurp the man’s authority. She bounded to her feet, pointer in hand, and inflicted upon her captive audience a detailed account of her committee’s summer work. Two absent instructors missed a most stimulating forty-five minutes. Several audience members became so enthralled that they had to close their eyes to shut out distractions. Headmaster Fitzroy sprawled across the lectern, his head face down on his arms. He resembled a Raggedy Andy doll.

Just twenty minutes into her lecture, the audience mistook Strupples’ pause for breath as the end of proceedings and rewarded her with restrained applause. Some started to stand. Leticia Strupples was having none of it. She tapped her pointer on a metal chair and uttered the three words dreaded most by all who must attend such meetings. “And in conclusion...” she stated.

“Meetings, bloody meetings,” whispered Warneke. “Hell, I’m sure, will be one eternal meeting. And *that woman* will be the chief tormentor.”

Strupples continued, exhausting her material some thirty minutes after exhausting even her three unnamed co-conspirators. She then beckoned those reluctant, reticent gentlemen to stand with her and, upon prying the last free of his seat, led the group in an affecting bow. Polite applause ensued.

Fitzroy stirred, raised his head and said, “Thank you for that, Madam. Very good... yes, well... If no one has any questions...” His eyes swept the room. “Good! I think we can—” A brisk movement at the back of the auditorium caught the headmaster’s eye.

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Warneke took one giant step forward and begged pardon. “We need to have just one minute to confer,” he explained and turned to Willoughby-Wallows. He placed his hand on the young man’s shoulder and raised the other, palm outward, toward the audience. He resembled a traffic cop.

Like compliant drivers, Fitzroy and the others waited. Warneke placed his ear a few inches from Willoughby-Wallows' mouth. Traffic remained at a standstill. All eyes remained fixed upon the two men. Warneke pursed his lips and squinted as if considering some great secret.

"What on earth are you up to, Sir?" whispered Willoughby-Wallows.

Warneke nodded and shrugged.

"Sir?" demanded Willoughby-Wallows and cast a questioning glance towards the headmaster.

"Well, that's no problem," Warneke loudly exclaimed. Then, so only Willoughby-Wallows could hear, he whispered, "Do you or do you not want your own room, Son?"

"Oh, yes, Sir, I do," Willoughby-Wallows answered with an enthusiastic nod. "Absolutely!"

"Beg pardon?" shouted Warneke. He cupped a hand behind his ear and leaned towards his roommate.

"I said, yes. Yes, *I do!*" repeated Willoughby-Wallows more loudly.

No one heard the question. Most heard the reply. Everyone saw the young man nod. Warneke pushed his companion back into the corner and then paced halfway down the centre aisle. "There is one small item... if I may, Sir. It's hardly worth mentioning. I'll get through this quickly so we can go and eat." Warneke knew the audience had grown restless and hungry. "Right-oh then! It's about the dorm, Mr. Fitzroy. You see, I have so many other responsibilities and, well... with helping out young Mr. Wither... my friend here... well... Mr... or... my young, um, colleague and I were just discussing—" Warneke glanced at Willoughby-Wallows. "—Weren't we, Sir?" he asked. "Well, the long and the short of it is... we were saying... it would be a capital idea to have this gentleman... younger you know and more in common... with the... the youngsters, I mean. He's very eager to contribute, Sir. And I really don't mind—"

"—What is it that you want, Professor?" Fitzroy interjected.

"Oh, not I, Sir. You've got me all wrong, Sir. It's my young friend here, Sir. You see, he presumed *he'd* be supervising the dormitory. He's very disappointed, Sir."

"Well, why didn't he just say so?" exclaimed Fitzroy and looked at the clock. "I don't have any objections if you don't. It's all settled

then? Right!" He jotted down a note. "How good of you... Walloughby-Willows. That's the spirit," he added. "I did get your name right, didn't I? Of course I did," he muttered. "No objections anyone?"

"No objections, Sir, none at all. Thank you, Sir. Let's go eat," cried Warneke and headed for the exit as the rest of the teachers stood to go.

Willoughby-Wallows stepped in front of the big man and whispered, "How could you, Sir? How... how... how dare you!"

"*Mind?* Me... mind? Never! And, there's no need to thank me. No need at all," shouted Warneke over the clang and clatter of chairs.

Willoughby-Wallows had a hundred things to say. But, when he tried to speak, no sound crossed his parched lips.

The ever-helpful Warneke came to his rescue. "We've no objections at all, eh? I say! What? Capital and all that. Right, my lad?" He slapped Willoughby-Wallows on the back in an affectionate, a filial, a not quite fatherly fashion. "I believe tea is served," he added.

The crashing and banging of chairs ceased and the staff stampeded towards the exit. Warneke tugged Willoughby-Wallows in front of the doors. Like cows being shooed away from a breach in a fence, the leaders of the charge veered away. The herd followed: bedlam.

"But, but... wait!" cried Willoughby-Wallows.

But too late. No one heard his protest.

"Tea is served. A chance to mingle and welcome our new professor," shouted the headmaster. He turned on his heel, squeezed through the opening in the stage curtains, passed into the students' locker room and fled the scene.

"Don't worry, my boy," advised Warneke. "You'll love it up there."

"Up there?" was Willoughby-Wallows' wild-eyed retort. "Up where, Sir?"

"Why up in the dorm," exclaimed Warneke, the very picture of innocence. "You can't very well supervise the boys from my lodgings now, can you? I'm going to miss you. Barely got settled in, what?" With another *right-oh*, the English master beat a hasty retreat.

St. Timothy's new Greek and Latin man thought his feet had been fastened to the floor. He watched Warneke hurry off, unaware that he had been left blocking the doorway.

Jim Darling squeezed past with a quiet, "Excuse me, Sir?" The man's

escape sparked a wholesale evacuation. Like water from a breached dam, the teachers spilled past Willoughby-Wallows into the corridor and dispersed. As they passed the new teacher they pretended to have misplaced glasses and pens. They hurried by as if he were a leper. Leticia Strupples patted Willoughby-Wallows' arm.

Only Professor von Baumgartner stopped for a word. "Watch him, Sir. That man wears a belt and suspenders."

"What, Sir?" inquired Willoughby-Wallows. He was already confused and the old man's comment baffled him.

"*Once Upon a Time in the West*, Sir."

Willoughby-Wallows frowned.

"Henry Fonda?" added the German master.

The Greek and Latin man's face pleaded ignorance.

"Never mind," continued von Baumgartner. "Just don't trust him... We'll chat later."

The lights went out. The door swung closed. Willoughby-Wallows found himself both literally and figuratively alone in the dark. The new dormitory supervisor's head swam as he turned to leave the room. He felt terribly tired and weak. He walked like a motion-sick man departing the rollercoaster.

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On his way past the staff refectory, Willoughby-Wallows stopped and peered inside. He felt no inclination towards food or idle chatter. He jumped and clutched at his heart when Miss Strupples tugged on his sleeve.

"You must wait for tea," she told him. "We need to talk." The woman dragged him further down the corridor and out through a doorway into the afternoon sun.

"Miss Strupples—" Willoughby-Wallows began.

"—Leticia," corrected the woman. "We're not all as stuffy as that, that Warneke. Do I call you Wilf or Wilfred?"

"Whichever, Miss Strup..." The woman wagged a boney finger under her companion's nose. "I mean Leticia," said Willoughby-Wallows.

"Much better," she exclaimed and led the young man into the back lane. Strupples removed a slim, silver case from her vest pocket and held

it out to him. Willoughby-Wallows, managing to disguise his shock, declined. "What was that awful man—" Miss Strupples stopped to light a cigarette, "—up to in there?" she asked. Her head disappeared in a puff of blue-grey smoke.

They walked across the grass towards the steam plant – St. Timothy's people called it the powerhouse. Its smokestack towered over everything for miles around. "Was he twisting your arm, Wilf?" inquired Strupples.

"Twisting my arm?" gasped Willoughby-Wallows. "Oh, no! Worse than that. You see, I had no idea what he was up to. I didn't even know there was a dormitory supervisor."

"Then, why'd you volunteer?" demanded Strupples.

"Volunteer! I didn't volunteer! Professor Warneke, he... he... he volunteered me."

"What?" demanded Strupples.

"He just let on I was asking him to."

"What?" the woman repeated, hardly able to believe what she was hearing.

"It wasn't 'til the very end that I figured things out," Willoughby-Wallows continued. "But by then it was... well... too late."

"Oh, that scoundrel," grumbled Strupples and stamped her foot. "Never trust him, Wilf, never," she added as she took the young man by the arm and began hauling him back the way they had come.

"We'll just see about this," she added as they stepped through the doorway onto the stairwell landing.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To see Headmaster Fitzroy," explained Strupples. "We'll get this straightened out right now."

Her companion dug in his heels and caught hold of the banister. Strupples pulled harder. Willoughby-Wallows held on for dear life.

"I really don't want to cause anybody any trouble," he pleaded, recalling *Tips for Teachers*.

"Nonsense, Wilf," the woman replied. "Mr. Fitzroy will just have to take this up with that... that old reprobate."

"I think, Miss Strupples..." Willoughby-Wallows replied, grunting in his vain effort to free his arm. "Well... Mr. Fitzroy doesn't seem... well, you know..."

“Um...” grunted the woman. “You’re probably right.” She released her grip. Willoughby-Wallows massaged his arm. “But, remember what I said. Under no circumstances trust that awful man.”

The woman propped the door open with her foot and waved her arms about to dissipate the cigarette smoke. She looked like a large bird attempting to take flight. “I’m not supposed to smoke in here,” she explained. “Well, go along and eat.”

Willoughby-Wallows headed for the refectory.

“Wilf,” Miss Strupples called after him. He turned to see the woman leaning into the building, holding her cigarette outside. “Someday, somehow, someone’s going to pay that brute back. You just mark my words. A day of reckoning is coming.”

As Willoughby-Wallows approached the staff refectory, the last of the diners left. Like rats scurrying down the dimly lit corridor they vanished at his approach. Willoughby-Wallows surveyed the remains of the feast. Cups, saucers, scrunched-up paper napkins and luncheon plates littered the tables. The serving trays had been given a thorough going over. The scene reminded him of a fairground the morning after the circus leaves town. As he gleaned remnants from the table, he heard Professor von Baumgartner’s voice. Turning, he saw the old man sitting in a shadowy corner.

“Go ahead. Get your tea. I was just thinking you might not show up at all,” announced the German master. “You must think us unfriendly?”

“Pardon, Sir?”

“The fellows... They’re avoiding you,” replied von Baumgartner.

“Do you think so?”

“Oh, no! I *know* so. It’s your... your close relationship with the English master.”

“Really?” exclaimed Willoughby-Wallows.

“Really,” repeated the German master. “You’ve been with us less than twenty-four hours and you’re already a victim of his dirty tricks. As I said, be very careful especially around Warneke. Dirty tricks are a way of life here.”

“I see what you mean, Professor. But I’ll be seeing a lot less of him,” explained Willoughby-Wallows. “I have to move up to the dorm soon, I guess.”

“Warneke’s pulled another fast one and there’s not a thing to be done about it,” the old fellow continued. “And let me tell you, he’s just the worst of a bad lot. Now, let’s drop this *sir* and *professor* business, eh? My name is Rolf. Call me Rolf, please. And yours again... is...”

“Oh! Wilfred, Sir, but Wilf, if you prefer,” he answered while searching the table for something to eat.

“Let me see... I think I prefer Wilf. And remember, Wilf, my name is not sir,” von Baumgartner added. “I should have warned you about Warneke... Wilf,” the old man continued. “But I’m afraid I didn’t get to you in time.”

“You’re not the only one, Rolf. Who wanted to warn me, I mean.”

“Leticia has spoken to you then, has she?” asked the old man. “Good! That’s very good. She’s trustworthy, Wilf, but a little too... well, how should I put it? Excitable. She suspects that Warneke’s the only one. And that’s rather unreasonable, of course. And oh, how she resents him.”

“She does, Sir— I mean, Rolf. She suspects him, I mean. She told me as much.”

Von Baumgartner stood and made for the door. “I’ll leave you now, Wilf,” he said. “But do keep a sharp eye, okay?” He winked, checked the time, turned and shuffled off down the corridor.

As Willoughby-Wallows ate, he thought about what Warneke had done. Four words his mother had often used entered his mind and he repeated them aloud. “Of all the gall!” he muttered.



As Willoughby-Wallows approached Warneke’s lodgings, he noticed a student standing opposite his old room. With a shoulder against the wall, the fellow stared into what the new dorm supervisor took to be a Science text. Beside the lad, stood several pieces of furniture. The boy tucked his tie inside his blazer and ran his fingers through his bright red hair.

“Mr. Willoughby-Wallows, Sir,” announced the boy, “I’m Andrews, Sir. Head Student, Sir.” Willoughby-Wallows’ eyes had locked onto the furniture: his furniture. “Oh, I’ll have all that put back in storage for you, Sir. No need to worry yourself about that stuff, Sir.”

Andrew's repetitions of the word 'sir' threw the man off stride. "Ah... Andrews, is it?"

The boy nodded.

"I see..." said the Greek and Latin man.

"The professor, Mr. Warneke, that is, Sir. He asked me to take your belongings up to the dorm, Sir. So I rounded up a couple of the fellows and they— they should be finished by now, Sir."

Willoughby-Wallows stared from the boy to the furniture and back.

"You did want your stuff— your belongings, I mean— moved, didn't you, Sir?" The head student received no response.

"It's alright, isn't it, Sir?" asked Andrews. "I mean, I haven't done anything wrong, have I, Sir?"

"No, no... Of course not, Andrews, of course not." Willoughby-Wallows patted the boy on the shoulder. "It's just that I didn't expect such... such efficiency, I suppose." His eyes were fixed on Warneke's door.

"Shall I show you up to your rooms, Sir?" asked the head student. "I'd be happy to, Sir."

Willoughby-Wallows' imagination fastened on the word 'rooms'. He thought it sounded promising. As he followed Andrews down the hallway he asked, "Somebody'll bring my dresser along, will they?"

"Oh, no, Sir. What I mean, Sir, is you'll not need it, Sir. Maybe once you see your new lodgings, Sir, you'll understand better, Sir."

"But my clothes?" exclaimed Willoughby-Wallows and pointed towards what had been his dresser.

"Ah!" replied the boy. "Your clothes, Sir... Well, they're already up there, Sir." He pointed at the ceiling. "Mr. Warneke packed everything in your suitcases for you and—"

"I see," Willoughby-Wallows grunted. He glowered at Warneke's door. "Is the professor in?"

"Yes, Sir. But he told me to wait for you and to make sure nobody disturbed him."

Andrews started towards the exit with Willoughby-Wallows close behind.

"Tell me, Andrews, about our roles. You know, head student and dormitory supervisor. What are we supposed to do?"

“Well, Sir... Oh! Before I forget, Sir. Professor Warneke asked me to make sure to tell you— I’m not quite sure what he meant by this, Sir— he guesses you won’t be needing his key any time soon. Does that sound right, Sir?”

Willoughby-Wallows was too stunned to reply.

Andrews chose to postpone wondering about the new teacher’s strange behaviour and began to answer his earlier question. “We have to ring the bells and keep the students from getting out of line. We’re policemen really, Sir. Dorm’s closer if we use this staircase, Sir.”

They started the long climb.

“I have a room at the senior end. You get two rooms at the junior end.”

“Two rooms?” asked Willoughby-Wallows.

“Yes, Sir,” replied Andrews. “There’s a laundry collection area and a place for trunks separating the two dorms. The guys who’ll be graduating get private rooms on the second floor... except for me, of course.”

Andrews and Willoughby-Wallows arrived at the dorm supervisor’s quarters. The boy pulled a key from his pocket. “This is yours, Sir. If I may... a piece of advice, Sir?” he whispered while holding up the key. He surveyed the surrounding cubicles for possible eavesdroppers. “I’d use this, Sir, and I wouldn’t let it out of my sight.”

The young teacher stared at the key. He did not think to ask Andrews the reason for the warning. Indeed, it did not even register that the boy’s words were a warning.

“Well, thanks, Andrews,” he said and pocketed the key.

“Welcome, Sir.” The boy turned and started back through the dorm.

“Oh, Andrews?” called Willoughby-Wallows. The boy turned and waited. “I didn’t catch your first name, Andrews.”

“My *first name*, Sir?” replied the head student with a hearty but short-lived laugh. “Oh, excuse me, Sir.” Andrews clamped a hand over his mouth. “Sorry for laughing, Sir, but you don’t need to know that, Sir. I’m Andrews, Sir, and I can’t have you calling me anything else, especially in front of the guys, Sir. Good-bye, Sir.”

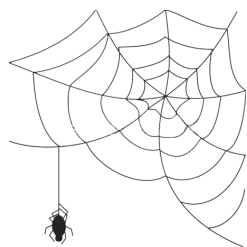
Wilfred Willoughby-Wallows opened the door and entered his new lodgings. He discovered why Andrews had not had the dresser carried

up. Through a door on the back wall to the very small front office, he could see an even tinier sleeping area. His baggage was stacked on the single bed that took up half the room.

“Well, at least Warneke won’t keep me up half the night with his snoring and his other nonsense,” mused the new dorm supervisor.

And thus began a new phase in the life of Wilfred Willoughby-Wallows, St. Timothy’s Preparatory School’s newly appointed Greek and Latin professor, probationary.

## St. Timothy, I Presume



Meddows masked a smouldering indignation. Even when Emerson's second mention of a tuba threatened to fan coals of resentment into full flame, the older boy kept his emotions in check. Emerson paused to ponder the meaning of so cool a response and then followed the three older students through the chapel doorway. Pandemonium greeted him. Over thirty new boys milled about in confusion at the junction of the chapel's main and side aisles. Their eyes pleaded for help from the sniggering, snorting and scowling older students who hogged space on their pews. Veteran students beckoned newcomers to sit, only to push them away when they responded. The drill was a hackneyed first day ritual at St. Timothy's. Faces glowed crimson with either hilarity or humiliation.

Emerson sized up the situation at once, lowered his eyes, charged through the throng and made straight for the nearest pew, brandishing his guitar case as a knight would his lance. The bench's dumbfounded occupants ceded ground and Emerson slumped down onto the seat. As the boy twisted and turned in an effort to stow his guitar beneath the pew, he felt a sharp jab in the ribs. Looking to his left, he discovered Burns and, next to him, Meddows. The two boys' threatening looks disappeared when a loud, angry voice filled the chapel.

Andrews had entered through the back doorway. He shouted, "Enough already!" Those familiar with protocol donned angelic masks and exhibited excellent deportment. New students froze in place and gawked, unsure of what else to do. The head student, ignoring the melee, save for a 'tut-tut' in passing, made his way to the pulpit.

"This is the chapel," he announced. "Forget that and you'll regret it. That's a promise, Gentlemen." The redheaded boy unfolded a sheet of paper and added, "If you're not new here you'd better be sitting one pew back of where you sat last year. If you've forgotten..." He did not need to finish. A score of boys stood and shuffled to their proper places, leaving

the two pews at the front empty. Andrews shook his head as he scribbled each offender's name in his notebook.

As Meddows passed Emerson, he stepped on the boy's foot. "Sorry, Jenks," he growled.

"Meddows!" cried Andrews. "I've got my eye on you, Meddows. And you too, Burns. I'd advise you to stay well clear of your friend there, Burns."

Meddows played the innocent. His toady smirked. The head student continued. "You guys who tried to put one over on me... don't try it again. I know who you are." He slapped his palm with his little black book. "I have no intention of letting you embarrass me." Andrews paused. "Okay then... seating assignments."

He scanned his list and called out, "Albertson... first pew, right side."

No one moved.

"Al-bert-son!"

A short, plump boy emerged from the scrum and raised his hand. Andrews beckoned. To a chorus of subdued snorts, Albertson slunk forward, genuflected and started to sit down.

"Other right, Albertson... and tuck in your shirttail."

A loud, short-lived bark of a laugh rose from the back pew.

"Reynolds, was that you?" demanded Andrews.

Several helpful students leaned to the side to give Andrews an unobstructed view of their friend. Repentance registered on Reynolds' face, betraying his guilt.

"Come see me after lunch, Reynolds," ordered Andrews as he jotted down a note. Albertson used the distraction to slide to the end of his pew.

Andrews continued seating the newcomers. "Condon, first pew, left side." Andrews called out another five names. Five more boys left the huddle and took their seats. "Jenks, third row, right side."

When Emerson had taken his newly assigned seat in the pew bordering the chapel's side aisle, Andrews continued. "Sitting there means you're the new sacristan, Jenks. Burton, the fellow, there, at the other end of your pew..." Emerson, wondering what a sacristan was, leaned

forward, looked past three boys and acknowledged Burton's wave. "Show Jenks the ropes, Burton."

"Now listen up, people," warned the head student after everyone was seated. "You new fellows in particular. When a warning bell sounds, you follow the others straight here. If I catch you straggling in late..." Andrews scanned the room. So many faces having turned from cherry red to pasty white confirmed that his Captain Bligh-like reputation was established. "When I dismiss you... like this..." continued Andrews and knocked on the pulpit, "you'll file out in two rows. Orderly rows. You new fellows here in front will leave first. You others know the drill." Andrews rapped again, stepped into the aisle and cried, "C'mon, let's go."

The boys spilled out of the pews and formed a ragged queue behind their leader. On reaching the basement corridor, students jockeyed for position near the refectory doors.

"Hinerman," called Andrews after stepping into the large room, "you have table one. Johnson, you're at table two." Soon, a senior student stood at the head of each table. Andrews addressed those remaining in the corridor. "The head of your table reports all problems to me. Understood?"

They seemed to understand. He began calling out table numbers and students' names. "We'll chant *Te Deum*," ordered Andrews when he had finished.

New boys gawked at their tablemates as the Latin hymn rang out. At the word 'amen', there was a thunderous racket as over one hundred boys dragged chairs from under the tables and the newcomers began talking.

"Quiet!" Once more Andrews' voice rose and silence fell. "Who gave you permission to speak?" he demanded. "When I knock, you'll lift your chairs and keep the noise down to a dull roar. You new fellows, you have one week to learn *Te Deum*. The head of your table will tutor you." He rapped on his table and a harmonious hum replaced the crass cacophony. From their seats, Andrews and his assistant enjoyed an unobstructed view of the diners.

Emerson's contemplation of the seating arrangements was interrupted when his neighbour tapped him on the shoulder. Turning, he looked into a massive chest, then up into a broad, swarthy face and a

toothy grin. He marvelled that he had not seen this boy earlier. The giant seemed to have materialized out of thin air.

"I'm Guardiano," the boy announced as a student waiter set lunch on the table. "Minestrone," announced the big boy after peeking into the terrine. "Hate it!" His gaze and his hand shifted from the soup to the sandwiches. "You play guitar, huh?" he asked Emerson before stuffing one half of a sandwich into his mouth.

Emerson considered repeating his tuba quip but thought it unwise to antagonize this particular boy. "A little," he answered. "You?"

The boys' three tablemates snorted and then stared at each other in silence before breaking into scornful laughter. Guardiano's face glowed red and he bowed his head.

"What?" demanded Emerson and stared from face to face.

"Angelo Guardiano! Play guitar? He can't even play the hi-fi," the head of the table explained to the amusement of the others. They subdued their laughter to avoid drawing Andrews' attention.

Guardiano's head slumped forward and the boy said nothing. Emerson opened his mouth to defend his neighbour but he was distracted when someone poked him between the shoulder blades. He turned his head and his attention to the table behind him. A boy wearing a puzzled grin pointed across the room and shrugged. Emerson's eyes swept to his left and came to rest on Meddows who sneered, pretended to strum a guitar and, using his chin, gestured towards his two friends. The expressions Burns and O'Neil wore conveyed something between amusement and intimidation. Emerson looked away and stared down at his empty plate.

Minutes later, Emerson turned to Guardiano. "If you'd like to learn guitar, I'll teach you," he offered.

Guardiano squinted, thinking hard.

"Anybody can learn," Emerson added. "I taught my sister... and a couple of friends of mine."

To say that their tablemates were sceptical about the big boy's ability to learn guitar would be a gross understatement. Their hooting died a quick death when they felt Andrews' steady, suspicious and disapproving gaze settle upon them.

"It's Jenks, right?" asked the boy at the head of the table. Emerson nodded. "I guess I shouldn't laugh, Jenks. Maybe you can teach Guardiano