

Room 13B

Her name was Mrs Hickey, although she preferred to be called Ms as she felt it made her seem younger. Nevertheless she was known as Mrs, due to her aged complexion that seemed to gain more wrinkles as the days went by. She was one of those unfortunate teachers that seemed to bounce from one school to another, trying to find a permanent job but only ever succeeding in filling in a temporary position for a younger teacher on leave. In addition to that, schools only wanted to take on teachers of a younger generation, who they so kindly explained, would 'connect with the kids better'. It was basically their way of saying you're too old. Being on the wrong side of 40 with weight issues didn't exactly help either, even though she had more experience in her little finger than these 'new teachers' had in their whole bodies. She believed that teenagers found substitute teachers to be fresh meat and that first impressions went a long way. However she never got emotionally involved when disciplining behavioural issues within the classroom, as she had found over her 20 years of teaching that those who did, didn't seem to live as long. That was until she met the second year class of St. Augustine's College, County Meath.

She stood outside room 13B at 9:50 am, her knuckles turning white as she clenched the pile of books in her hand, anxiously waiting to face her class. So many things could go wrong in this class and she knew it. First off her whole idea of wearing high-heels so she could look down upon her students may not have been such a good idea especially when she wasn't used to wearing such footwear. She noticed that the green

door standing between room 13A and 14 seemed to be the only one with the paint peeling off and one of the numbers hanging upside down. In her mind this didn't indicate that quiet, pleasant classes used this room for their lessons. However she couldn't waste any more time. She fixed her skirt, brushed a speck of lint off of her gleaming white, button down shirt and held her head high as she opened the door and walked into the classroom. She walked towards her desk feeling every pair of eyes boring holes in her plump body, from the four rows of fine oak desks, which had long since been desecrated with graffiti. The walk to her desk seemed to take forever and her balance betrayed her as she stumbled forward, her heel snagging on a chipped corner of the cold, hard marble that made up the classroom floor. She just about managed to regain her balance before collapsing into her swivel chair. But her stumble and the flushed look of embarrassment on her face were enough. The class erupted with laughter, all except for one boy, who looked genuinely worried and concerned. He cleared his throat as the laughter began to die down and asked,

“Are you okay miss?”

She immediately felt gratitude towards him. “Yes I'm fine thank you” she replied as she surveyed him. He was the only boy in the class who was sitting up straight in his chair, with his shirt buttoned up to the last and his tie pulled tight against his neck in a Windsor knot. His hair was smoothed flat on his head and his kind face was distorted into expressions of worry and concern. “What is your name by the way?”

“Liam, and I wouldn't worry about your stumble miss. It could happen to anyone carrying around all that weight”, he replied.

“Yes I suppose you're right. My books are fairly heavy”, she agreed.

Liam managed to keep a straight face for about three seconds before replying, "I didn't notice you were carrying any books miss"

The class exploded with laughter, some resorting to banging on their tables to be the loudest. Mrs Hickey looked up again feeling her face reddening. That kind face that had voiced concern was now twisted in a cruel snigger. He untied his top two buttons and threw his tie on the floor as he ran one hand through his hair, undoing the neatly combed quiff. Mrs Hickey tried to settle down the class but her efforts were to no avail. The lesson continued with constant sniggering and disruption. When the end bell went, Mrs Hickey sat fuming as the boys departed from room 13B. As the last boy left, she took out her copy book and began to plot her revenge.

Although she had revenge in her heart, however petty it felt, she knew that if she had any chance of getting even, she would have to stoop down to his level. This meant mainly relying on cheeky remarks and arrogant humour. His biggest strength was also his greatest weakness; his peers. If she could just make a fool out of him in front of his classmates, then she might actually have some hope of regaining control and getting on with the curriculum. Just like taking out a key card in a house of cards; one goes, they all go. She had a plan and she set about putting it in place.

The next day at 9:45am the first bell went and Mrs Hickey's class filed into room 13B. As she saw all the boys pass she noticed a shocked look on the majority of their faces. Perhaps they had presumed they had broken her, reduced her to nothing more than a blubbing mess, as they had with so many of her predecessors. Seeing their apparent

displeasure at her cheery humour, filled her with a warm sense of happiness that spread from her head to her toes. As expected, Liam was the last to enter, with a cocky, arrogant smile on his face. Determined not to let him get to her, Mrs Hickey put on the biggest smile she could muster and said,

“Good morning Liam, please take your seat, we’re about to begin”

Upon seeing her so happy, Liam’s grin faltered for a second, but he righted himself and went to take his seat. The class all had eyes on him, his cheeky grin still ever present, but as he took his seat there was an eerie creak. The legs buckled and the ground rushed up to meet the bottom of Liam’s chair, leaving him sprawled across the ground; his legs in the air and his head looking up at the ceiling. The class was all but silent except for the noise of the few tinkling nuts and bolts that were rolling along the ground. Mrs Hickey knew that her trick was juvenile, but she felt alive as a mad rush of adrenalin rushed through her body. The class paused for a second to stare at Liam before beginning to openly point and laugh, some shouting comments that they thought were funny like, ‘have a nice trip?’. Mrs Hickey half-heartedly tried to silence the class as she rushed over to assist Liam, glee still shining through her old and weary eyes. Liam tried to right himself as she approached, but only succeeded in tripping over his upturned chair which only turned the class into a mad frenzy of laughter, some crying and blowing their noses while others clutched their stomachs in apparent pain. Mrs Hickey offered her hand to him but he slapped it away. The class suddenly turned silent, so fast in fact that it felt like somebody had sucked all of the oxygen out of the room. Liam pulled himself to his feet, his features enraged and his eyes fiery with anger, and shouted, “You did this didn’t you?”

Mrs Hickey pretended to be innocent but he wasn’t buying it.

“I made a joke yesterday. Called you fat. And this is your way of getting even isn’t it?”

She made no attempts to deny it and could feel the tension that had descended over the class

“You’re supposed to be the adult and you’re not. You’re just a..... a bitch!” he screamed in her face, his anger seeming to overwhelm him. That five letter word hit her hard and she could see that the class were shocked to hear such a word uttered within the confines of a classroom. She felt that white-hot anger rise within her again and she screamed, “Get out of my class... Now!”, her voice raising an octave with each word. Liam just turned and ran, tears streaming down his face. Revenge tasted bitter in her mouth as she had reduced a teenage boy to tears because her pride had been hurt. She turned around and the entire class was looking down, avoiding her gaze if at all possible. She turned her back on them and walked back to her desk, feeling yet again every pair of eyes tracking her movement, except for one. She knew now that although she had gained control over them, she had lost whatever respect they had for her. Tears began to well up as she said to the class, “Open your books on page thirty-two”.

By Cian Boyle