

A School Lunch Hall

Condensation slides its way down the window, leaving behind it a ribbon of smooth, murky darkness. The sheer suffocating heat and humidity inside suggests the number of drenched bodies seeking refuge from the relentless onslaught of rain. In one corner, a single teacher loses the battle to restrain a group of shouting children and is swamped in a wave of uniformed bodies. Buzzing with anticipation, their instincts triggered by the promise of food, the mass of children charges past him into the canteen. Dragging back some small measure of control, he finally manages to stem the flow and continues to thin out the crowd at a steadier pace with many jealous glances towards the table where several of his fellow teachers' lounge, indulging in a few sweet, children-free minutes. As the room fills, the shouts, yells and vague discussion coming from the hoard of tatty teenagers rise to a pitch and volume that could shame a football crowd. Wanting to live up to their reputation, the children continue their barrage of sound, undeterred by the half-hearted efforts of their teachers. Finally, however, as the initial rush of eager bodies reduces, the disruption falls to a minimum and the children split off into groups.

At the center of one such gathering sits a rather plain girl putting up with the unwanted attention of several of her social superiors. She is clearly used to this type of bullying, and she continues her meal in silence. Finally bored with watching their comments bounce off the girl without effect, the group turn their attention to a table surrounded by an invisible force field apparently coming from its dozen or so occupants. This group seems to reject any lesser being that attempts to come within three feet of their sacred ground. This creates a ring of admirers who look up to the mixture of reputation and charisma within. Those teenagers within this bubble of admiration seem to have no intention of letting any others into the group. Enough gold and fake diamonds to replicate the entire crown jewels covers the same uniforms that seem to repel any similar attempt by any other pupil. One particular girl, smiling with all the dazzling intensity of a chat show host, is obviously a new addition to the group. Ecstatic at her place in this most sacred of circles, she looks down from the Mount Olympus of the dinner hall at the insignificant drones beneath her, attempting to display some of the haughty dignity of the established members of the gang. As the initial lure of the dinner hall lessens, several of the hardier students decide to brave the weather outside and leave the overcrowded, damp stuffiness to those willing to endure it for its relative comfort and the knowledge that hours spent on hair will not have been in vain. Suddenly a loud crash echoes around the hall bringing most of the children out of their relaxed stupor. For once the whole student body is united in hilarity, all eagerly scanning the three-hundred or more people for the guilty party.

The culprit (a minute, year seven boy) stands next to the offending pile of broken china and, as several of the older students begin to whoop, proceeds to flush a deep red as he prays for an escape from the blinding spotlight. Unfortunately, the hole in the ground fails to appear for him as it has failed so many others in similar situations and he is left at the mercy of hundreds of delighted teenagers.

Finally, the yells subside, quelled by steely glances from several of the teachers, and they are replaced by the ominous tinny chime of the bell, forcing all the children out into the merciless rain.