



How Come the Janitor's Room Is So Small?



Once there was a school janitor named Mr. Squeegee who groused about his job.

“The school hallways are too long for me to sweep,” he groused to the principal.

“The chalkboards are too wide for me to wipe,” he groused to the teachers.

“The lunch tables are too heavy to roll up and down,” he groused to the lunch servers.

During breaks, Mr. Squeegee would sit in his janitor's room and grouse to himself. “The sinks are too large to scrub. The windows are too tall to wash, and the front steps are too steep to shovel on snow days.”

The janitor's windowless room was as spacious as any classroom. Shaggy mops and brooms of various sizes hung

along the walls. Stacks of yellow sponges, reams of paper towels, cases of light bulbs, boxes of trash can liners, cans of floor wax, tubs of cleaning solution, bags of dust rags, and bottles of window spray filled the high shelves.

“The trash cans are too cumbersome to carry,” Mr. Squeegee went on grouching. “The desks are too bulky to move, and the gym floor is just too huge, period.”

Still, no matter how much Mr. Squeegee groused he always did an excellent job of sweeping, fixing, wiping, scrubbing, and shoveling. Everything in the school was kept in working order, and the school’s staff and students appreciated him very much.

On Mr. Squeegee’s birthday, April 1, many students made the janitor birthday cards. Nelly Woo, a first-grader, brought Mr. Squeegee a chocolate cupcake with a single candle stuck in the middle. “Happy birthday, Mr. Squeegee,” she said. “Thank you for all you’ve done for our school.”

“The light bulbs are too high to change, and the pencil sharpeners are too low to empty,” the custodian grouched. “And the flagpole out front! Why, it takes me forever to raise the flag to the top of it. It’s too tall!”

Not until after school, when all the students and staff had left, did Mr. Squeegee returned to his janitor’s room to

eat his birthday cupcake. First, he found a match and lit the candle.

“Before I eat Nelly’s treat I’m going to make a birthday wish,” he told himself. “I’ve grown old. I can’t do the all work I once did. I just wish this school wasn’t so big to clean. That’s all.” Then he blew out the candle.

The janitor ate the cupcake and washed it down with a carton of milk. Afterwards, he sat at his desk to order more light bulbs, floor wax, and paper towels. When his paperwork was finished, he turned around and got the surprise of his life. The side walls of the room, that moments ago were ten feet to his right and left, were now within arm’s reach, and the back wall, that had been a good sponge throw away, could now be touched with a broom handle.

“My room has shrunk!” the janitor exclaimed. “Look how small it is!”

Mr. Squeegee leaped to his feet, nearly striking his head on the overhead lights. He ran from the hall and found more surprises. The hallway, classrooms, office, and gym had shrunk as well. The gym was now the size of the first-grade classroom; the first-grade classroom was no larger than the school office, and the office was smaller than a coat closet. Everything inside the rooms—the

desks, chairs, chalkboards, drinking fountains, and lunch tables—appeared in miniature as well.

“What’s happened?” Mr. Squeegee said. “How did my school get this way?” But almost at once, he remembered. “This is my doing. I wished for a smaller school, and that’s what I got. A mini-school. What have I done? The children can’t learn in such a tiny cramped place.”

The janitor ran from one end of the hallway to the other. This took only a few seconds.

“The classrooms are too small for a class to fit in,” he said. “The desks are too short to sit behind, and the books are too tiny to read. What have I wished for? How can I undo my blunder? I must find another birthday candle to make another birthday wish. I must wish for the school to be its normal size.”

Mr. Squeegee hunted through the little office and through the little library. At last, he found a little candle inside a little teacher’s desk. But by the time he lit the candle with a little match, the little clock on the wall read midnight and his birthday had past.

The janitor paced the shortened hallway to think. “I’ve watched the children make many wishes,” he told himself. “I know there’s more than one way to wish. This school must return to the size it was before anyone arrives in the morning.”

Mr. Squeegee ran to the school kitchen. He found a wishbone left over from the day's chicken lunch. With thumbs and forefingers, he pinched both ends of the tiny bone.

"I need a lucky break," he said. "I wish the lunchroom would grow to the size it was yesterday."

He pulled the wishbone apart—*snap!*-- and looked around. But the lunchroom was still small.

"There are more ways to make a wish," Mr. Squeegee said, and he ran out to the playground.

Beside the swing set stood a well from which the school drew its drinking water. The well was now the size of a shoebox.

Mr. Squeegee pulled a penny from his pocket. He closed his eyes and dropped the coin into the well. "I hope this is a wishing well for I have an important wish," he said. "I wish the playground would grow to the size it was yesterday."

Mr. Squeegee opened his eyes and sighed. The playground remained one-eighth its normal size.

"But I know another way to wish," he said.

The janitor raced back into the shrunken school and entered the little first-grade classroom. There he found a tiny bottle of blue finger paint and dumped it on a mini

sheet of paper. He spread the paint around with his pinkie.

“I heard the first-grade teacher teach this wishing rhyme. *Touch blue and your wish will come true.* I wish the classroom would grow to the size it was yesterday.”

The janitor looked around and frowned. The classroom was still small.

“How else do children make wishes?” he asked himself.

Mr. Squeegee crawled into the playhouse-size library. In the wee hours of the night, he sat on a little table, thumbing through a tiny book called HOW TO WISH. He tried everything he read about. He blew a cottony puff off a dandelion stem and wished upon the fluffy seeds that flew every which way. He rubbed a lamp, hoping a genie would appear. He clicked his heels together three times. But by dawn, the school was no larger.

At sunrise, Mr. Squeegee sat in his small room, sipping coffee from his miniscule coffee mug. “The children will arrive in an hour,” he said. “How will I explain this puny school to them? How ashamed I am for the wish I made. Why did I grouse so much about my work?”

The janitor stepped into the hall and looked out the window. The sky had turned to purple and every star had blinked out but one. A golden star shone above the

undersized school. This was a star, known by many children as the School Star, for they see it while waiting for the school bus.

“The School Star!” Mr. Squeegee exclaimed. “I’ve seen children making wishes upon the School Star. It’s my last chance.” He crossed his fingers and toes. “Now how does the School Star rhyme go?”

After a moment of thought he began,

“Golden star, School Star, up above the school so far.

On tests today please help me pass.

And grant me any wish in class.

I wish that the hallway would stretch. I wish it were the way it was when the children left yesterday.”

Nothing happened. The hallway remained unchanged.

“So a School Star wish is as worthless as a wishing well wish or a wishbone wish,” the janitor said. “Now all I can do is wait for the children to arrive.”

Mr. Squeegee shuffled down the hallway. He was heading into the tiny teachers’ lounge, when he felt the floor move under his feet.

“I’m woozy from lack of sleep,” he said.

He leaned against the wall and felt more movement. He looked forward and saw that the hallway was stretching outward.

“No, the hallway is expanding!” he shouted. “Wahoo! The School Star wish is working! Oh, but can I add to the wish?”

The janitor charged into the first-grade classroom. “And I wish this classroom would grow big, big, big,” he said.

Instantly the four walls and ceiling began moving. The room was enlarging.

“Thank my lucky star!” Mr. Squeegee said.

He skipped to the playground and shouted, “And I wish the playground would stretch and stretch.”

He ran to the library. “And I wish the library was eight-times this size.”

He bounded to the gym. “And I wish the gym were as giant as before.”

Room by room, Mr. Squeegee ran through the school, wishing desks, chairs, bulletins boards, and everything else were wider, longer, higher, and heavier. One after the other, the rooms and every item in them returned to their regular size. When he reached the office, he spotted the first school bus rolling into the parking lot.

“Just in time,” he said. “The whole school is back to the way it was, just the way it should be.”

Mr. Squeegee grabbed the American flag and ran out the front door. He attached the flag to the top of the stubby flagpole.

“And I wish this flagpole...I wish it would grow to twice the height it was before my selfish wish,” he said.

Meanwhile, the students climbed off the school bus. They marched by the flagpole without looking up. If they had, they would have seen the flag at the top, rising higher and higher.

Nelly Woo stopped by Mr. Squeegee. “Did you like the birthday cupcake,” she asked.

“Yes, indeed,” the janitor answered. “And I learned that it’s important to be careful with birthday wishes.”

Not until morning recess did Mr. Squeegee open the door to his janitor’s room. He reached for his widest broom and grinned. In his haste in wishing the school to regain its normal size, he had forgotten one thing. He never wished his room to enlarge, so it remained small.

“Now the School Star is gone,” the janitor said. “But no matter. I’ll enjoy this school day of cleaning and fixing, and I promise to never to grouse about my job again.”

Mr. Squeegee kept his promise. From that day on, he worked about the school always wearing a smile. The school was so spotless and well maintained that it became a model for future schools. Today schools have classrooms

large enough for dozens of students and libraries that can hold many stacks of books. But as for the janitor's rooms, they remain small. Now you know the reason why.