



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 to sweep," he groused to the principal.

"The chalkboards are too wide to wipe," he groused to the teachers.

"And the lunch tables? They're too huge to roll up and down," he groused to the lunch servers.

During breaks, Mr. Squeegee would sit in his janitor's room and grumble to himself. "The sinks are too large to scrub. The windows are too tall to wash. And don't get me started on the front steps--they're way too steep to shovel on snow days."

The janitor's windowless room was as roomy as any

classroom. Shaggy mops and brooms of various sizes hung along the walls. The high shelves were packed with 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.

“The trash cans are too heavy to haul,” Mr. Squeegee went on grouching. “The desks are too bulky to move. And the gym floor? That's just plain too big, period.”

Still, no matter how much Mr. Squeegee grouched, he always did an excellent job of sweeping, fixing, wiping, scrubbing, and shoveling. Everything in the school stayed in tip-top shape, and the school's staff and students appreciated him very much.

On Mr. Squeegee's birthday, April 1, 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! It takes forever to raise the flag to the top. The pole is just too tall!”

Not until after school, when the students and staff had all gone home, did Mr. Squeegee returned to his janitor's room to eat his birthday cupcake. He struck a match and lit the candle.

"Before I eat Nelly's treat, I'm going to make a birthday wish," he told himself. "I'm getting old. I can't do the all work I used to. I wish this school wasn't so big to clean. That's all."

Closing his eyes, he blew out the candle.

The janitor ate the cupcake and washed it down with a carton of milk. Afterward, he sat at his desk to order more light bulbs, floor wax, and paper towels. When the paperwork was done, he looked up and got the surprise of his life. The walls of the room, which had been twenty feet apart moments ago, were now within arm's reach. He picked up a broom and tapped all four walls with the handle.

"My room has shrunk!" he said. "Look how small it is!"

Mr. Squeegee leaped to his feet, nearly bumping his head on the overhead lights. He had to stoop to get out the door. In the hallway he found more surprises. The entire school was much smaller. The gym was now the size of the first-grade classroom; the first-grade classroom was no bigger than the school office, and the

office was smaller than a coat closet. Everything inside—the desks, chairs, chalkboards, drinking fountains, and lunch tables—had shrunk along with the rooms, perfect miniatures in every detail.

“What’s happened?” Mr. Squeegee said. “How did my school end up like this?”

Then he paused and 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 a place this cramped and tiny.”

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

“The classrooms are too small for learning,” he said. “The desks are too short to sit behind, and the books are too tiny to read. What have I wished for?”

He shook his head. “How can I undo my blunder? I need another birthday candle to make another birthday wish. I must wish the school back to its regular size.”

Mr. Squeegee hunted through the shrunken office. He found a little candle inside the little secretary’s desk. But by the time he lit the candle with a little match, the little clock on the wall struck midnight, and his birthday had passed.

The janitor paced the shortened hallway, thinking hard. “I’ve seen the children make many wishes,” he said.

“There’s more than one way to wish. My school must return to its full size before the children arrive in the morning.”

Mr. Squeegee hurried to the school kitchen. In a tray by the sink, he found a wishbone left over from the day’s chicken lunch. He pinched each end with his thumbs and forefingers.

“I need a lucky break,” he said. “I wish the lunchroom would grow back to its regular size.”

He gave the wishbone a sharp pull—*snap!*--and looked around. Nothing. The lunchroom was still small.

“But there are still more ways to make a wish,” Mr. Squeegee said, and he ran out to the playground.

Beside the swing set stood a stone well from which the school drew its drinking water. The well was now no bigger than a shoebox.

Mr. Squeegee pulled a nickel from his pocket and closed his eyes. “I hope this is a wishing well, because I have an important wish,” he said. “I wish the playground would grow back to the size it was yesterday.”

He dropped the coin into the well and heard the faint *kerplunk* when it hit the water.

When he opened his eyes, he sighed. The playground remained unchanged, still small and unless.

“But there are still more ways to wish,” he said.

The janitor raced back into the shrunken school and entered the little first-grade classroom. On a miniature shelf he found a tiny bottle of blue finger paint. He poured a drop of paint on a scrap of paper and spread it around with his pinkie.

“I once heard the first-grade teacher recite a wishing rhyme,” he said. “*Touch blue and your wish will come true.*”

He closed his eyes. “I wish this classroom would return to its normal size.”

But when he opened his eyes, he frowned. No change. 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 MAKE A WISH.

He tried everything he read about. He blew a cottony puff of seeds off a dandelion stem. He rubbed a lamp, hoping a genie would appear. He clicked his heels together three times. He blew on a fallen eyelash. But by dawn, the school was no larger.

At sunrise, Mr. Squeegee sat in his small room, sipping coffee from his minuscule 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 peered out the window. The sky had turned purple, and one by one the stars were blinking out. One star, however, remained shining bright and golden above the undersized school.

"The School Star!" Mr. Squeegee said.

Children often spoke of the School Star. They saw it each morning while waiting for the school bus. It was the star they wish upon for good quiz grades, kind teachers, and lessons that made sense.

"I've seen them wishes on it countless time," Mr. Squeegee said. "This is my last chance. I'll wish on the School Star, too."

He crossed his fingers and toes. "School Star, I wish that the hallways would stretch back to the length it was when the children left for home yesterday."

He waited.

Nothing happened.

"So, a School Star wish is as worthless as a wishbone wish or a wishing well 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 shift beneath his feet.

"I'm just woozy from lack of sleep," he said. "That's all."

But when he leaned against the wall, it moved too. He looked forward and saw the hallway was stretching out before him.

"No, the hallway's 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. "School Star, I wish this classroom would grow and grow," he said.

At once the four walls creaked outward and the ceiling upward. The wish was working.

"Thank my lucky star!" Mr. Squeegee said.

He skipped to the playground and shouted, "School Star, 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 floor were as ginormous as before."

Room by room, Mr. Squeegee raced through the school, calling out wishes as he went. Desks rose, chairs widened, bulletins boards ballooned, and chalkboard

expanded. Everything grew longer, taller and heavier, until the school looked just as it had the day before. When he reached the office, he spotted the first school bus rolling into the parking lot.

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

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

“School Star,” he said, looking upward. “I wish this flagpole would grow...twice as tall as it was before my selfish wish.”

Whoosh! The flagpole shot skyward, stretching high above the school roof, just as the school bus pulled to the curb. The students poured out and filed into the school as if nothing at all had changed during the night.

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

“I sure did,” he said. “And I learned something important...be careful with your birthday wishes.”

It wasn't until morning recess that Mr. Squeegee return to his janitor's room. As he reached for his wide push broom, he froze. In all his hurry to wish the school back to normal, he'd forgotten one small thing. His janitor's room was still tiny.

“Now the School Star has vanished,” he said with a shrug. “But no matter. I’ll enjoy this school day of cleaning and fixing, just the same. And from now on, I promise not to grouse about my job.”

These days schools have grown much larger. Classrooms are bigger, hallways stretch farther, and playgrounds are the size of football fields. But janitors' rooms? They remain small.

Now you know why.