

Mice Don't Taste Like Chicken

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Mr. Cross

Drew inhaled with anticipation as he crossed the threshold of Mr. Cross' sixth-grade classroom. A vile stench of rotting vegetables, wood shavings, and animal droppings invaded his nostrils. A dozen reptiles eating, drinking, and doing their business in a confined space magnified the smell's potency. He forced down the rising bile with a swallow.

Illuminated glass cages lined the counters. Despite the nauseous feeling in his gut, Drew had to fight the urge to head for the animals. Instead he read the message his teacher scribbled on the chalkboard.

Welcome to Sixth-grade

1. Keep away from the animals! Violators will be prosecuted.

2. *Unpack your bag and make your lunch choice.*
3. *Meet your neighbors.*
4. *Don't worry. You'll get used to the smell.*

Mr. Cross set down the chalk and looked to Drew. “Good morning, Mr...”

The glimmer from a jeweled earring on Mr. Cross’ left ear caught Drew’s surprised eyes. “Harrington. Drew Harrington.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Mr. Harrington. Make yourself comfortable.”

Drew located his personalized Popsicle stick on the nearby table and dropped it in the “Lunch Packer” cup. He removed his backpack and coat and hung them in a locker along the wall.

Several students searched the room for their seat. Drew passed a pod of four empty desks and spied his nametag. It displayed Andrew Harrington scrawled in cursive black Sharpie.

On his right, Kim Etter, a classmate back in third grade. Straight across from him sat Jackson Harris, Drew’s best bud since kindergarten. Diagonal right, the infamous Troy Schwartz.

Jackson strode in with the sound of the morning bell and slapped Drew upside the head. “I see T.T. will be joining us.” He dropped his bag to the floor and pointed to Troy’s seat. “Keep your emergency poncho handy in case he springs a leak.”

Drew rubbed his head but smiled. “Yeah, remember back in second grade when Troy peed his pants thirty-two days in a row?”

Jackson laughed. “The punches in the kidneys all these years on the playground can’t be helping T.T.’s bladder issues.”

Troy stood behind Jackson with an uneasy smile on his face. “No more Tinkle Troy?” he asked.

Jackson twisted his torso around and grinned at Troy. “What can I say? We’ve matured.”