

THE UGLY RUG

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Mr Strand was a permanent sub, moving from one class to the next, from English to science to math as the winter flu moved from the germy students to the even germier faculty, and moving with him was a toupee that made him stand out from an unremarkable sub roster making the rounds that winter. I first noticed it during science lab, when my Bunsen burner wouldn't light. As he hunched over the spigot, I saw that nothing moved at the top of his head.

When he walked by later at lunch – he filled in for the lunch monitor, too – I asked my friends, 'Does he wear a toupee?' All necks craned in his direction, and that was it.

As word spread, Mr Strand's nickname became Ugly Rug, and for each of us, confirming his wig became a persistent goal. For weeks we'd drop objects near his desk or ask him during gym class to demonstrate a cartwheel (he wouldn't).

One day, as we left the music room, we saw it. The ugly rug on the floor at the top of the stairs, Mr Strand lying next to it, eyes closed, a small pool of blood under his bald head. And in the moment it took for me to kneel and for someone else to get help, and for another to pump his heart like she'd learned in CPR training, I prefer to forget how the ugly rug went into the crowd, how it was placed in jest on someone's head and then another's, the only small grace being that Mr Strand lay there, eyes shut, unable to see the fruit of his undoing.



Flash

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