

Merciless Mace and Jackson Splutter Gun

by Martin Bourne

On the first day the main corridor seemed huge and long and the ceiling had thick metal crossbeams and I saw older boys jump up and touch them or hang off the lip for a few moments before their fingers gave way but they had to beware of Merciless Mace, the deputy headmaster, who was inclined to give a boy a clout if he saw them jumping up, and not long after I started at the school he made sure to leave an impression on me and all I was doing was staring, well daydreaming really but the problem was that Mr Mace was standing in front of the window and thought I was staring at him but I wasn't it was a bird on a tree keeping its body still while the small branch was moving in the breeze and Mr Mace pointed at me and shouted that I would find myself in real trouble if I carried on looking at him like 'that' and the thing is I was just staring out the window and it was during assembly when the whole school was in the big hall and suddenly like a hot wind 400 pairs of eyes were drilling into me and they all had smirky smiling faces and it seemed so unfair because I was only staring out the window.

I didn't cry, felt like it, but instead my eyes twitched and after Mr Mace had moved on my friends held up their palms and rubbed their hands together and whispered, "tomato face."

Why couldn't Mr Mace be more like Mr Jackson, the headmaster. We called him splutter gun because he had the unfortunate habit of spitting when he talked. If he was on dinner duty we would cover our food when he walked by but out of that spitting mouth came a voice that was as rich as a buttery apple pie. The difference between the two men was as big as a valley. We were terrified of Mr Mace and would run and hide but all the kids would flock round Mr Jackson like a load of chirruping sparrows. The day I remember as the best was when Mr Jackson came striding across the snow covered school field dressed as Father Christmas with a great big red sack full of presents over his shoulder. Of course we all knew it was Mr Jackson especially when he started spitting through his beard and as he was handing out presents he said to my teacher Mrs Davies in his warm chuckling voice,

"Shona, my beard is slipping and now they are going to see who I am."