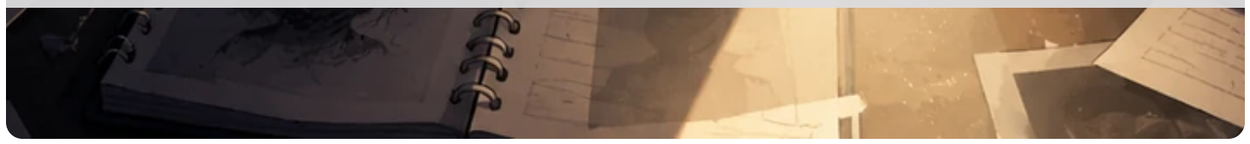


The Classroom With 31 Students

Sravya





Leo enters the bright Roblox-style classroom of 8B, tossing his backpack onto his desk while high-fiving his friends. As Mr. Henderson counts the students to start the day, Leo's eyes widen in confusion because he counts thirty-one heads in a room that is strictly limited to thirty.



At the very back bench sits a mysterious boy in a grey hoodie, his face partially obscured by shadows and his eyes fixed on the floor. Mr. Henderson walks right past the boy to collect homework, seemingly unaware that an extra person is sitting in the corner of the room.



Jax turns around to crack a joke, asking the new kid if he is lost or just really likes math, but the boy does not blink. Instead, the stranger whispers a specific secret about a toy Jax broke three years ago, leaving Jax trembling and wondering how a stranger could know his past.



The atmosphere grows heavy during the afternoon lesson as Mia suddenly drops her pen and looks at Leo with total confusion. She asks him who he is and why he is talking to her, her eyes glazed over as if years of their friendship have been wiped from her mind in an instant.



Panicked by Mia's memory loss, Leo and Jax sneak out of class and rush to the school's basement archives. They navigate through dark, flickering hallways until they find a heavy, ancient yearbook hidden under a pile of old desks, its cover thick with decades of grey dust.



They flip to the Class of 2004 page and freeze in absolute terror at the black-and-white image staring back at them. The students in the twenty-year-old photograph are wearing the same outfits and have the exact same faces as everyone currently sitting in Class 8B.



Jax points a shaking finger at a boy in the old photo who looks exactly like him, even possessing the same small scar on his chin. In the back row of the vintage picture, the same hooded boy from their classroom stares out at the camera with a haunting, knowing smile.



The boys sprint back toward their classroom, but the school hallways begin to stretch and warp like a glitching video game. Every other student they pass is standing perfectly still in the corridor, staring at the ceiling with blank, expressionless faces as if they have been hollowed out.



They burst into Class 8B to find the hooded boy standing at the front of the room, slowly writing Leo and Jax's names on the chalkboard. He turns around and speaks for the first time, his voice sounding like grinding stones, telling them that the cycle is finally ready to reset.



Leo looks down in horror as his blocky Roblox hands begin to pixelate and fade into white light, losing his grip on reality. The mysterious thirty-first student steps closer and whispers that they will all be fresh and new for the next class, just as the classroom door completely disappears.