

Leo: Leadership

There was bedlam in the room as Jeff entered, and he looked around in surprise. Because of his monitoring duties, he arrived a few minutes late each morning, and by then the class was usually hard at work. Today, however, groups of students were clustered together here and there, talking and laughing, a few boys had feet on their desks pretending to be asleep, a wad of paper thrown across the room hit a girl unexpectedly and made her scream, and the noise was deafening.

Obviously, Mrs. Trask hadn't come yet, and there was no substitute. The kids were making the most of it, too. A few, fingers in their ears, were trying to read, but most seemed to be enjoying a holiday. "Hey, Jeff, join the party," called one, and he went over to a group of boys discussing plans for the weekend.

"Isn't this great?" said a burly youth who was having trouble staying on the football team because of his grades. "I haven't done that history homework, and if she stays away all period I'll be safe!"

"It'll catch up with you tomorrow," mused Jeff, frowning. "Thought you were going to try harder — you know the team needs you."

"OK, Captain, OK," the boy bowed sardonically, making a face, "but I'm still glad she's not here."

Another boy ran past, pursued by a girl screeching, "Marty, gimme my purse!" Jeff reached out and with a strong hand grabbed Marty's shoulder. "Give her purse back. You're not still in first grade are you?" he said severely.

"Fuzz!" muttered Marty, but he returned the purse.

Jeff, hands in pockets, stood surveying the scene a bit longer, his frown deepening. The noise was getting louder, the two class trouble makers were up

to no good, and things were threatening to get out of hand. Jeff thought a moment and squared his shoulders.

Then he strode to the front of the room and hit the top of the desk with a yardstick. "OK, you guys, pipe down," he bellowed. A few people looked up, but it was a few minutes before he achieved silence.

"No wonder they call us irresponsible if we carry on like this the minute we're left alone."

"Look at who's trying to play teacher," called one of the trouble-makers with a sneer. "You looking for a job, Teach?"

"Cool it!" Jeff turned on his tormentor with such an authoritative voice and face that the taunting stopped.

"Now," he continued, "there's not a person here who doesn't have something to do. Remember that geometry exam tomorrow."

Groans from around the room made him smile. "See? Now how about acting like adults, sitting down, and trying to get some work done. I for one could use the time."

A few muttered objections were heard, but most students started drifting toward their seats.

"Jeff's right," said one, "I guess we did sound like a zoo."

"Worse than that!" laughed Jeff.

It took a little more time, and a few more encouraging, as well as threatening, words from Jeff, but in a little while the class members were all seated — if not actually studying, at least quiet. Jeff, too, took his seat and opened a book, but kept a wary eye on the two trouble-makers who continued to whisper and look meaningfully at Jeff.

Soon almost everyone in the room was lost in his work, and all was still. Suddenly the door opened, the Principal came in — and stopped short in amazement.

He looked around the room, his smile broadening.

"Well," he said, "this is a surprise. For a minute I thought Mrs. Trask must have come. She's had car trouble, and will be here in half an hour. I was going to stay with you myself, but I see I don't have to. Even Marty and Jock are in their seats!"

Marty and Jock beamed angelically.

"Who worked this miracle?" asked the Principal.

Jeff said nothing, but one of the girls answered, "Jeff got us in line, Mr. Hoover. We didn't start out this quiet."

The class laughed and Mr. Hoover chuckled, "No, I don't imagine you did — but all is well now. Good work, Jeff. It takes a real leader to get people organized like this, and you've done a fine job."

Mr. Hoover left, the students continued hard at work, and when Mrs. Trask arrived somewhat breathlessly half an hour later, everyone was delighted with the amount of work he had been able to finish.

"Thanks to Jeff, I won't have any homework to do tonight," said someone to a round of applause.

"Mr. Hoover told me what Jeff had done," said Mrs. Trask, "and I'd like to compliment him. It's no easy task to get a high school class in line — as I know only too well — and I'm glad he was able to get you to realize the importance of utilizing your time well and remembering why you are here in the first place. We often hear it said that the world needs better leaders, and the best time for them to begin is when you are young."

"There's something else, though, Mrs. Trask," said Jeff. "A leader won't get very far if the people he is trying to lead don't cooperate. The kids cooperate very well."

"Yes, they did," Mrs. Trask smiled, "and I think we all learned a good lesson here today."