



Jake Maguire emptied the dustpan into the trash can. Then he glanced around the big room.

From 8:00 to 5:00 the community college lounge was packed with day students, talking and laughing. But this time of night there were only a few students sitting at the tables. Most of them were quite a bit older and more serious than the daytime crowd.

Jake was glad there was less mess to clean up in the evenings. But he missed the lively presence of kids his own age.

“Hey, Maguire, get back to work!”

Jake jumped a foot. Old Ted Flannery—the head janitor—had a bad habit of sneaking up

behind his assistants and scaring them. As if his weird black clothes and greasy black hair weren't scary enough!

Jake turned and glared at the old man. "I'm on it, okay?"

Ted chuckled. "Start cleaning those tables now. You know the drill: First wash them, and then wax them. I want this place spotless for tomorrow."

"Yeah, yeah," Jake muttered. He took the broom and dustpan to the janitor's closet.

While he filled a pail with water, Jake thought about how suddenly his life had changed for the worse.



Until a few weeks ago, Jake had thought his life was going great. He had a good job—the same one he'd held all through high school. His boss was all for kids going to college. He was glad to let Jake arrange his work schedule around his classes.

The day he registered for college, Jake had been lucky. He got all the classes he needed

and he met Yolanda Melendez. To Jake, Yolanda seemed to be as perfect as any girl could be. She had a great sense of humor and the prettiest smile he'd ever seen. Best of all, she shared many of Jake's interests.

As luck would have it, they found they'd enrolled in the same French course. It was his only night class. He and Yolanda had agreed to study their French lessons together.

Then, just a couple of weeks later, Jake's whole world fell apart. First, his boss went out of business. That meant Jake needed another job right away. He'd been relieved to find the janitor's job on campus. But he'd had to drop out of the French class.

Jake was disappointed. But at least Yolanda had promised to study in the student lounge, so they could talk on his breaks.

So where was she? For the last couple of nights, there'd been no sign of her! Jake had called her cell phone several times but gotten no answer. Was she sick? Or maybe studying for a test? Or worse, had she met some other guy she liked better? Jake sure

hoped she'd show up tonight. He was getting worried.



Jake tried to get his mind off Yolanda. He had to get those tables cleaned so he could go home.

He was polishing a table when the lights flickered. Jake glanced up. For some reason, he felt a chill. Was he imagining things, or had the temperature dropped? And why had the room suddenly become so quiet?

Glancing over his shoulder, Jake noticed a group of strange-looking people coming in. Several guys and a couple of girls stood in the doorway, looking around the room. They seemed to be searching for something—or someone.

Again, Jake felt a sudden chill. There was something very odd about this group—but he couldn't put his finger on it. Maybe it was that they were all dressed in black. Or maybe it was that they carried no books or backpacks. No—it was the strange look in