

DON'T GO  
THERE



# THE BUILDING NEXT DOOR

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On a sunny day, sunlight shone across the classroom through the window of a school located in the middle of a city surrounded by concrete buildings. As children were giggling and talking to each other between classes, a teacher walked in and informed the students not to enter the building next door, as there were rumours that children had gone missing and it was not safe.

Three kids in pristine white school shirts and blue trousers, playing football in the classroom with a tennis ball, laughed and shrugged it off, carrying on as their friends watched them play. During recess, the three huddled together to discuss their curiosity, wondering what lay inside the building. They planned to skip class to explore, despite the teacher's warning and the boys ignored caution. No one knew of this rebellious plan not even their classmates.

They snuck out before the next class started, rushing down the stairs from the fourth floor and running along the building situated in front of a vast, empty playground where the golden-brown soil glimmered under the midday

sun. They jumped the tall parapet wall into the compound of the building next door and climbed the cement stairs along its side. The walls had begun to grow mould, the paint long faded.

When they reached the terrace, they found an open-plan apartment with no doors. Inside were groups of children, some in uniform smoking, others shirtless exercising and a few sitting on upturned buckets playing cards. As the three walked in, the others began talking to them. The boys joined in, smoking and chatting, curious about these kids who wore the same uniform but whom they had never seen at school. They thought they were the cool ones that skip classes.

After a while, they realised they needed to get back to class before being caught and started walking towards the door. But the new kids told them not to go and tried to hold them back. The three pushed them away and ran for the exit, when suddenly an older man, who appeared to be a teacher walked out from a side room near the front door. He asked who they were and, after hearing their reply, insisted they stay a bit longer. The man was wearing a dirty white vest and old trousers and seemed to have been cooking. His face was stern but carried a faint smile.

To avoid a scene, the boys agreed. They stood at the edge of the terrace, talking with the other kids and looking down at the street. As time passed, they realised they truly

needed to get back. When they said so, the teacher's voice turned sharp. He said "no" and told the kids playing cards to hold them. The boys struggled as the others grabbed them. Then the teacher said, "Don't you realise once you come here, you can't go back?"

They suddenly understood, the teacher was not their protector but their captor. The warnings about missing children and rumours about ghosts flooded back to them. Could these be the lost kids, trapped souls who could not leave? Perhaps they had tried to warn them, hoping the three might set them free. The boys wondered if anyone outside could even see or hear them anymore.

Desperate to escape, one of the boys started speaking casually to the teacher, inching closer to the end of the hallway to the front door. In a sudden burst, he shoved the teacher aside and shouted for his friends to run and bolted for the exit. As he glanced back, he saw the teacher shouting, chasing him, and finally grabbing his ankle just as he reached the door. The boy fell hard, his heart pounding, as he was dragged back inside and his eyes closed, freedom fading before him.