

The Chalk on His Sleeve



The last line on the hall's blackboard always seemed to climb uphill when Ivo wrote it. One Thursday, the young volunteer asked Martin for help.

Martin had painted shop signs until he retired. He still liked to write the weekly programme on the board by the door.

Martin showed him the faint guides he made first, then let him finish the last word. Ivo stepped back. His letters were larger, but they sat on the same straight line.

They needed to change the time underneath. Martin reached for the cloth.

"Wait," Ivo said.

He folded a sheet of scrap paper into a wide little trough and held it against the board below the old figures. As Martin wiped them away, most of the loose dust fell into the paper instead of onto the floor.

Martin looked at the clean tiles.

"Thirty-seven years," he said. "And nobody told me about that."

Ivo tipped the dust into the bin. Martin folded another sheet for the next change and tucked it behind the board.

Then he noticed a white streak on his own sleeve.
He brushed at it, producing a small cloud.

Ivo silently held out the paper trough.

Martin left the sleeve alone. Together they carried
the board back to the doorway, keeping the new
lettering turned towards the empty hall.

To remember

1. Martin shows Ivo faint guides for level lettering
2. Ivo catches dust beneath the figures with folded scrap paper
3. Martin keeps a paper trough for next time
4. A chalky sleeve defeats their tidiness, and they carry the board back together.