

# By 4th Grade at St. Paul's Elementary, No One Believes in the Spanking- Machine-in-the-Closet of Sister Alice Elenita's Office

*by* Nonnie Augustine

Arthur farts. Pandemonium.

Miss O'Kelly shouts, "Quiet!"

32 nine year-olds freeze.

"Close your books,  
fold your hands on your desk,  
put your heads down."

Obedience. Silence.

Until Susie's nose itches.

She scratches, creating a ripple.

Micky's foot, the right one,  
the jigglely one, jiggles.

Arthur's best friend Johnny,  
nose between knuckles,  
snorts. (The fart was a good one.)

In the back row, Mary Margaret  
in sly slow motion, turns her curly head,  
catches Arthur's peeking eye,

puffs out her cheeks, blows.  
Arthur wiggles his eyebrows, expertly.  
Peter's stomach rumbles, loudly.  
Susie sneezes. Smothered giggles.

Miss O'Kelly sighs. Considers. She could:

1. delay lunch
2. keep them in at recess,
3. write notes to go home

She settles for a stern reminder that God is watching,  
tells them to open their Arithmetic books to page 56.

Release! Shuffles. Tentative buzz.

Peggy and Donny drop their books.

Billy drops his pencil case.

Terry watches a cardinal in the big tree right outside the window.

Robby draws a tiny spaceship on the back of his homework paper.

Six names ring out, called to the chalkboard.

Four slog to the front, two know their stuff, stride right up.

Miss O'Kelly, in the back, grins at "her children." No one catches  
it. Arthur behaves, bides his time. His next joke will come.  
And he'll tell it, fearlessly.

