Mr Iverson, I need you to come down to your son's school.
I'm in the middle of preparing for a case. Can't this wait until, say, Friday?"

The woman on Mr Iverson's screen pursed her lips. She was Ms Wortham, Ivan's prime teacher. "It's very important. We need to talk."

"Well, we're talking."

On her forehead, wrinkles of frustration formed in an instant and then disappeared. She swept her hair over one ear.

Mr Iverson decided that Ms Wortham was so used to dealing with students, that she expected parents to fit into the student rung of the hierarchy. He pressed ahead while she was off balance. "What's the problem with Ivan?"

She hesitated. "He's been harassing a female student."

"That doesn't sound like my son."

"It sounds just like him to me."

Mr Iverson took that in.

She went on. "But I'm afraid it's more serious than that."

"What happened? Did he tell a joke the girl didn't find funny?"

Ms Wortham sighed. Softly, and not totally unsubtly, but it was a sigh. "No. Nothing that simple. Ivan checked out a bio-training kit, totally unauthorized, and he overrode some of the built-in safeties. Long-story short, he concocted a mixture of bioactive components."

"He slipped some of the resulting powder into Phyllis — into the girl's drink. It set up a reaction on her skin, temporarily causing a photosynthetic process, in a manner vaguely similar to the way chlorophyll works. It caused severe itching, and it turned her skin green."

"And not only that. He started calling her 'Chlorophyllis'. Several of the students followed suit."

Well, that did sound more serious than Mr Iverson was expecting. His pulse thudded in one ear. "Is she all right? Any permanent damage?"

"She's fine now. The effect wore off. Apart from the trauma and the fact that her classmates are still calling her Chlorophyllis."

Mr Iverson tried not to smile. Chlorophyllis indeed. He felt his heart slow down again. "OK, I'm sorry this happened, and I'll have a talk with him when he gets home."

"But —"

He knew what she was going to say, and moved to head her off. "Look, No permanent damage. She's OK now. This is basically a minor inconvenience, right? And boys will be boys."

Ms Wortham's eyes narrowed and she suddenly rubbed her temples. Mr Iverson wasn't sure where he had gone wrong, but he concluded he'd said too much. He shut his mouth.

The woman said, "Well, that wasn't actually the end of it. The girl — Phyllis — is pretty bright. She decided to pay Ivan back."

For an instant Mr Iverson pictured his son with green skin. That didn't seem as funny.

"What did she do?"

"For starters, she, too, misused a bio-training kit and produced a similar powder. She, er, bribed one of Ivan's friends into slipping some of the powder into Ivan's lunch. As a result, his classmates dubbed him 'the Little Green Man.'"

“Well, while Ivan was scratching himself and being preoccupied with a bit of a crowd, Phyllis went down to the comm research centre and checked out a portable teleport terminal. And before you ask, yes, I’ve given her a stern talking to.

“She waited until she was in a class together with Ivan and then complained of a physical trouble — a, er, female trouble. She was dismissed, and shortly after that the class instructor received a request for Ivan to visit the headmaster.

“Well, you can probably see where this is going, so to speak. Ivan exited the classroom, and walked right into the open teleport transmit terminal.”

“Where was he sent? Or do you even know?” Mr Iverson felt his cheeks warming.

“Oh, we know. Phyllis forged some communications and managed to get a link set up with the main colony on Ganymede.”

“Holy crap! That’s near Jupiter, right? She sent him to Jupiter? Is he back now?”

“Well, no. That brings us to the next phase. And, as I said, I have given her a strong reprimand. Anyway, as soon as the teleport transmission started and Ivan was on his way, Phyllis sent follow-on instructions to program the distant controller to shut down until the next scheduled maintenance visit.”

“You’re kidding! So Ivan’s stuck on Ganymede?”

“Oh, no no no. They’re sending him home. On the next supply ship. The station doesn’t have the surplus power to initiate a teleport transmission back to Earth without an overwhelming reason.”

“This sounds like an overwhelming reason to me!”

“Well, as you observed about Phyllis, Ivan is all right. He’s suffered no permanent damage. He’ll be home in no more than forty-five days.”

“Forty-five days? But he’ll miss the tournament. And final exams.” Mr Iverson realized too late that he should have put the missed finals at the top of the list.

“I know, I know,” Ms Wortham said. “I’m really so sorry about all this. The woman looked him square in the eye and added, “But I can sense that you, of all people, will understand this. Girls will be girls.”

John E. Stith’s novels include Redshift Rendezvous, a Nebula Award finalist, and Manhattan Transfer. His Tiny Time Machine is just out from Amazing Stories.