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jan·i·tor  (jăn ĭ-tər)

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n.

1. One who attends to the maintenance or cleaning of a building.
2. A doorman or doorwoman.

[Latin *iānitor*, doorkeeper, from *iānua*, door, from *iānus*, archway; see **ei-** in the Appendix of Indo-European roots.]

jan'i-to ri·al (-tôr ē-əl) *adj.*

Word History: In Latin *iānus* was the word for "archway, gateway, or covered passage" and also for the god of gates, doorways, and beginnings in general, known in English as Janus. Our month January—a month of beginnings—is named for the god. Latin *iānitor*, the source of our word *janitor* and ultimately also from *iānus*, meant "doorkeeper or gatekeeper." Probably because *iānitor* was common in Latin records and documents, it was adopted into English. In an early quotation Saint Peter is called "*the Janitor of heaven*." The term can still mean "doorkeeper," but in Scots usage *janitor* also referred to a minor school official. Apparently this position at times involved maintenance duties and doorkeeping, and the maintenance duties took over the more exalted tasks, giving us the position of janitor as we know it today.

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