

Down By The Berry Patch

"Shut Up, Mr. Morgan"

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I slid my chair back, stood tall, raised my chin, and strutted out of the gym.

THE END



I wanted the story to end this way when it was being played out, but at 15, I lacked the courage to make this happen. The situation was just too intimidating. I was concerned for Delores, but more concerned for myself. What if I got marked down for the day? What if I got a failing grade in World History? You had to pass the class to graduate. What if I got kicked out of school? A teacher just shouldn't get away with belittling a student. He knew he was crushing her and just wouldn't let up. Would a teacher who could be so cruel to one student in the class ever be forgiving of another who called him on it? Would he do the same thing to me? Mr. Morgan held all the power.

Delores came to Unionville when Gagetown closed their high school. She was always kind to everyone but wasn't always treated that way herself. Some kids snickered because she had a lisp. Every day she wore freshly polished saddle shoes, a navy blue straight skirt and crisp white blouse, with the same silk scarf that always hid under her collar, except for the perfect knot and ties that fanned out exactly in the center where the collar met. You could tell she slept on pin curls every night because her hair was combed exactly the same way every morning. When the girls rushed into the bathroom between classes, Dolores followed, glanced at her image as she passed the in the mirrors, then stood off to the side waiting to go to the next class while the rest of us angled for a spot in front of the mirrors to check out our hair and lipstick.

Surely she had been teased long before coming to our school. She had really supportive friends who came with her from Gagetown. The four of them always stuck together and, even though we often did things together, they pretty much stayed on the fringe of the group that had attended school in Unionville forever. Maybe we were to blame for that because we were comfortable with the way things had been for most of us since Kindergarten and didn't take the time to understand what it was like to be the new kids. In fact, I never gave a thought to what it would be like to go to a new school.

Mr. Morgan was our history teacher. He thought he was really good looking and was always smoothing back the sides of his hair and flashing a fakey kind of smile. There were thirty-seven sophomores and we were all in the same class. Maybe he didn't like teaching a class so big that we met at tables in the gym, or maybe he just didn't like teaching. He wanted to coach and had to teach some classes in order to be able to do that. He never picked on his athletes; not even the ones who could barely read. He didn't pick on the strong students either. He zeroed in on students who were vulnerable and then picked away at them.

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Photo Caption: Unionville School

Unfortunately for Delores, her last name was Davenport. On this particular day, he kept calling on her, asking such difficult questions that no one in the class could possibly come up with good answers to them. Then, to top it off, he kept calling her "Miss Couch." I cringed every time he said, "Miss Couch," and flashed that smile of his. He was enjoying himself at her expense and I was appalled. Frustrated, I whispered to Rochelle, "I wish he'd just shut up and stop being so mean."

"Miss Liberacki, do you have something to say?"

Caught off guard and embarrassed to be singled out for whispering, my voice quivered as I shot back, **"I said, I wish you would shut up!"**

"If you don't like the way I run my class, Miss Liberacki, you may leave!"

I just sat there. My insides trembled in unison with the rest of my body. I was ashamed I couldn't force myself to take the steps needed to leave the room. I just sat there, angry with Mr. Morgan for abusing his power, at myself for backing down, and aching inside for Dolores who had no outward support. No one spoke out for her. She couldn't do it and neither could I.

Those silent steps I couldn't bring myself take, could have packed enough wallop to echo my message throughout the gym, increase its volume while soaring up three flights of stairs, and shouting the words in every classroom. **"Shut up, Mr. Morgan! Shut up, Mr. Morgan! Shut up, Mr. Morgan!"**

Telling Delores, as we climbed the stairs after class, that it was wrong for Mr. Morgan to pick on her, just wasn't the same as if the story had truly ended.....

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