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Mr. Green

English 9

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Behind Beloved Bricks

Principal Woods stands against the narrow doorway to her office, glasses resting over her youthful face. She resides over our sunny, brick palace, placing stones of success in the palms of students who complete another year. Unlike the strict school stereotype, glows with gentility and grace. “Say hello,” she whispers. “It’s Reverend Brewster.” Mrs. Woods gestures down the glossy hallway at the man with a caramel-colored complexion passing through.

“Hello, Red Rooster,” is the innocent echo. A kindergartener stares in admiration as my class strides behind the Rev. We file down the patina hallway, and I make sure to lighten my step as we pass the dungeon of a basement where the Dragon often snoozes in the guise of a radiator. Cutting out of line to steal a sip from the slender water fountain, I close my eyes for an instant at the memory of quivering on that muggy stairwell during the tornado last year. The cool water sliding down my throat reminds me of listening to Trinity’s rich voice hum “This Little Light of Mine” over the roar of the heater and whipping winds. Clear and strong and bright.

Resuming my place behind my classmates, I run my fingers across the walls, rejoicing in the *bumpity-bump* of the plaster against my calloused palm. My hands are different than theirs’; smaller, paler, and more fragile. But after a morning inside the New City building filled with counting, contesting, singing and reciting, I am ready to use them.

Ears perk up at the chant coming from the cracked door of the Kindergarten room. Ms. Foreman’s sharp voice splits the hum, “Hands? Feet? Chair?”

Children's voices cry back, "Closed. Flat." After a shuffling of feet and scraping of wood, the proud conclusion is, "Standing close to my desk!"

Swelling with pride, I lengthen my step as I pass by, relishing the fact that I am no longer sitting in front of the giraffe drawing and using plastic bears and beans to help me count. I am in *first grade*. Fingering the stitching on my uniform, I trace the red N on the label as we swing open the front door and run out to recess.

Marching into the neighborhood park, I stop at the spot where Korey's Plastic Proposal occurred. Like a six-year-old nomad, I drift along. Under the slide I join the scavengers who tunnel in the playground pine straw, searching for treasures like quarters and B.B. gun pellets. Keyasia and Trinity harmonize "Single Ladies," sitting in the swings, below which grooves have developed from countless feet dragging against the mulch. "Hey, Peanut Head," I hear.

Someone flips me a basketball inside the fenced court. Grinning in gratitude, I fling it upwards, making sure to stick out my tongue like Michael Jordan. 'Peanut Head' however, doesn't match the famed player in shot accuracy. The ball smacks the chafed corner of the backboard, and rolls into the fence in shame. While I shuffle my New Balances apologetically, a compassionate smile cuts across a seldom expressive brown face, and instead of a rebuke, I hear, "It's all good." We sweat in the park, then shuffle back, minds sharpened for the remainder of the day.

Though hands grew sore and calloused through cursive courses and kickball catastrophes, at the end of the year every student could still lift them towards their smiling mother and say, "I have overcome." The red brick walls of New City are far from me now, yet every time I hear a schoolmate in the crowd, see the wave of a brown hand, or smell the cologne that lingers on the wrinkled Chuck McElroy baseball card, the bricks fall into place, and I am home.