

A story for Mrs Brown

Mrs Brown had brown hair, brown skin, brown eyes

And warm brown hands.

Her name matched her appearance.

She was 49 and I was 8

Still counting with my fingers.

Mrs Brown was best at teaching reading, and I loved it when she did.

Immersed in her stories, captured by her words.

It was Tuesday.

We had been on a rugby excursion and were covered in mud.

Our class had not won the tournament but Mrs Brown was proud.

In Grade 3, all you want is to impress the teacher. To be liked.

Mrs Brown favored us all.

Put her time and effort into every student.

We sat in the classroom; she sat in front of us and told us how proud she was.

What excellent behavior we displayed.

What great sportsmanship we showed.

Most of us didn't know that word yet, but we were happy to have pleased her.

The school bell rang to hurry us home

Because it was a normal school day.

Inside the classroom's old green walls sat Mrs Brown

Planning another day.

It was 4.15.

I was in the next room with my violin teacher.

My little fat fingers couldn't quite reach the strings.

I could hear Mrs Brown humming.

I couldn't concentrate.

We heard a thump.

And the humming stopped.

Then we heard snoring.

I giggled.

My teacher laughed.

I shoved my grubby fist into my mouth to stop from bursting into hysterics.

This was going to be funny.

Mrs Brown had been complaining of a headache

And now she had fallen asleep!

I couldn't wait to tell the other teachers, they would laugh too.

We crept through the door and found Mrs. Brown on the floor.

My fat cheeks grinning

Little feet creeping.

I shuffled slowly towards her, thinking of all the ways to wake her up.

I looked down at Mrs Brown, lying under her desk.

My dad snored.

But not like this.

Mrs Brown's mouth was slack; drooping.

My music teacher was calling the ambulance.

I wanted to cover my eyes but I didn't move.

Inside me I ran away.

Inside me I screamed and sobbed. Pounded the ground and kicked the windows until they shattered.

Inside me, I shook Mrs Brown until she woke up and yelled "April fool!"
But outside, Mrs Brown was dying
Dying on the floor of her classroom; under her desk.
The paramedics didn't ask me to move but my violin teacher did.
"Come away now, we'll call Mum."
I looked a final time at Mrs Brown and warm.
And the flashing lights left my school.
We got a phone call that night.
My principal called every student.
How brave of her, to tell that same dreadful story over and over again.
I didn't go to the funeral.
I didn't want Mrs Brown to be in a box.
We had the day off school
But no-one was happy.
When we returned, her coffee mug still sat by the whiteboard.
We had a new teacher.
He didn't read the same way.
My friends begged me to tell them what I saw.
"Did it look like this?" they'd ask, and scrunch their faces up.
But I never had an answer.
Not even for me.
I didn't have nightmares about Mrs Brown but I thought about her a lot.
Heard her telling me to use clever words in my writing, and read with expression.
I picked a rose from my front garden, because Mrs Brown loved roses.
I didn't put it in water and I didn't give it sunlight.
I put it in the second drawer of my desk and waited for it to go brown.
Then I put the rose on the front verandah and warmed it in the sun.
Every day I kept those petals brown and warm.
When one rose crumbled, I replaced it with another.
Brown and warm,
brown and warm.
My Mum found the roses and threw them in the bin
Because she didn't understand.
I saw Mrs Brown's face in the moon that night.
So I sat on my verandah and talked to her.
I told her I was sorry I had no more roses, brown and warm.
But that one day I would write a story for her, using all my clever words.

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