

THE SCHOLARSHIP JACKET

Every year, during the eighth-grade graduation at my small Texas school, a beautiful gold and green jacket—the school colours—was awarded to the class valedictorian, the student with the highest grades for eight years. The jacket had a big gold “S” on the front, and the winner’s name was embroidered on the pocket.

My oldest sister Rosie had won it a few years before, and I fully expected to win too. I was fourteen, in the eighth grade, and had always been a straight-A student. My father was a poor farm labourer who couldn’t feed eight children, so I was raised by my grandparents. Since we couldn’t afford sports fees or uniforms, the scholarship jacket was my only chance to own something that represented achievement.

As graduation approached, excitement filled the air. Yet I often felt insecure—thin, flat-chested, and teased as “Beanpole” or “String Bean.” Still, what I had was my brain, and I had worked hard for eight years.

One afternoon, while going back to fetch my forgotten P.E. shorts, I overheard my history teacher, Mr. Schmidt, arguing with Mr. Boone, my math teacher. Shock rooted me to the spot when I realized they were talking about me.

Mr. Schmidt’s angry voice rang out: “I refuse to do it! Martha has a straight A-plus average, and you know it. I won’t falsify records.”

Mr. Boone replied calmly, “Look, Joann’s father is on the Board and owns the only store in town. We could say it was a close tie...”

I heard the word “*Mexican*” mixed in and realized they wanted to give the jacket to Joann because of her father’s influence, not because of merit. Devastated, I cried into my pillow that night.

The next day, the principal called me into his office. Looking uneasy, he said, “Martha, there’s been a policy change this year. The jacket will cost fifteen dollars. If you can’t pay, it will be given to the next in line.”

I was shocked. The jacket had always been free. With dignity, I replied, “I’ll speak to my grandfather and let you know tomorrow.”

At home, I found Grandpa working in the bean field. Nervously, I explained in Spanish, “The principal says the scholarship jacket will cost fifteen dollars. Otherwise, I won’t get it.”

Grandpa listened silently, then asked, “What does a scholarship jacket mean?”

I answered, “It means you’ve earned it by having the highest grades.”

After a pause, he said firmly, “Then if you pay for it, Marta, it’s not a scholarship jacket. Tell your principal I will not pay the fifteen dollars.”

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Though I knew he was right, I cried bitterly. The next day, I went back to the principal's office. When he asked what Grandpa said, I answered bravely, "He said if I had to pay for it, then it wouldn't be a scholarship jacket."

The principal stared out the window, sighed, and finally said, "Okay, Martha. We'll make an exception in your case. You'll get your jacket."

Tears of joy filled my eyes. At the end of the day, Mr. Schmidt winked and said, "I hear you're getting the scholarship jacket this year." I hugged him quickly and ran to the bus, crying again—but this time out of happiness.

When I told Grandpa, he simply smiled and patted my shoulder. Though he didn't show it, I knew he was proud.

Moral of the story- True honour is earned through merit, not privilege



Word	Meaning	Icon
valedictorian	The student with the highest academic rank who gives a speech at graduation	🎓🏆 A student wearing a cap holding a trophy
scholarship	An award given for academic achievement	📜💰 A certificate with a coin or money symbol
labourer	A person doing hard physical work, often for low pay	👷🛠️ A worker with a hoe or tool
agile	Able to move quickly and easily	🏃🏃 A person running or leaping
despaired	Lost hope or felt very sad	😞💧 A sad face with a tear
eavesdrop	Secretly listen to someone's conversation	👂🚪 An ear behind a door
falsify	Change the information to make it false	📄❌ A paper with a cross mark
coincidence	Two things happening at the same time by chance	🕒⚡ Two clocks showing the same time with an exclamation mark