

Deliverance

Teacher, student, and strap.

The tiniest teacher in the school was also its most senior. Every day without exception she came to school dressed in grays and browns, sometimes a black beret sitting precariously on a head of grayish brown hair, cut short, though still covering her ears. And for a dash of color she wore a beige scarf tied loosely around her neck. The boys most likely paid little attention to Miss Brown's dressing habits though they had good reason to, since she stood out to the boys in the school—hard to believe—as its giant disciplinarian, (and girls too, probably, though they were spared the specific punishment designed to make a man out of its recipients).

No matter what the problem was, if there was any altercation or kids' complaints of any kind, they went to the door of the staff room that opened out into the quadrangle, where Monday morning's assemblies occurred (lorded over by the alcoholic school principal), knocked timidly and waited. Inevitably, Miss Brown would come to the door.

"Yes? What is it?" Miss Brown would bark, usually munching, or seemingly so, on a biscuit, the crumbs falling on her beige scarf.

"There's a boy spying on us through the fence, Miss," complains the sixth form girl, her school jumper pulled tightly over her slightly bulging breast, her navy blue school dress reaching just below her knees. Miss Brown looked up at her face, then down at her knees.

"I'm not surprised. Look at your dress! School rules require that it be no more than four inches from the ground. Yours is at least six inches!" barked Miss Brown in her grating almost man's voice, so gruff for such a tiny person, or any woman for that matter.

"They was looking through the fence, Miss Brown," persisted the girl, looking down.

"They *were*, young lady, do you not pay any attention to your English classes?"

"Sorry Miss."

"Who is this boy? Where was he?"

"I'm not sure who it was, Miss. I think it was Geoff Peterson."

“And where are your manners? It’s Miss Brown, I’ll thank you very much!”

The girl stepped back from the step upon which the tiny Miss Brown stood, now on her tippy toes trying to make herself feared all the more.

Miss Brown waved her hand as if the girl were a fly. “Get away, now, and mind your own business, you hear me?”

The girl backed away as Miss Brown came down from the doorstep and called out to a boy who was crossing the quadrangle. “You there!” she barked, “come here, boy!” She stepped back up to the doorstep and the boy, probably a fourth former, approached her. “Do you know a boy called Geoff Peterson?”

“Yes Miss.”

“Yes what?”

“Yes Miss Brown.”

“Go find him and tell him he is wanted at the staffroom right away. Tell him to hurry as the bell for classes will be going in five minutes.”

“Yes Miss.”

“Yes what? You want the strap too?”

“Yes Miss Brown, I mean, No Miss Brown.”

The boy ran off. Miss Brown retreated behind the door of the staffroom and set up her step stool. She knew Geoff Peterson. He was the tallest kid in the school. Long and lanky, and took great pleasure in looking down at her.

Within minutes he arrived, knocking at the staffroom door. The diminutive Miss Brown opened it and straightened her scarf as she did so. Peterson noticed this and knew immediately he was in for it. She straightened her scarf every time she was about to use the strap, and looked straight ahead, which meant more or less looking at his belly button. She unfurled the strap, a yard of thick brown leather with a wooden handle bound to one end. She made the handle herself because the width of the strap was too big for her little hand to grasp the strap firmly. There was nothing more embarrassing than the strap flying out of one’s hand at the top of a swing. Peterson looked down at it. She had a way of jiggling it so that it looked a little like a snake hanging by her side.

Peterson pleaded, knowingly full well, that it was useless, “I

haven't done nothin' Miss!"

"You were spying on the girls through the fence. I know it was you!"

"No Miss Brown," he complained carefully, "it couldn't be me. If I wanted to look at them I could just get up on my tippy-toes and look over the fence." Peterson was putting on his usual tough defense.

"Put out your hand," demanded Miss Brown, ignoring his plea.

"But Miss Brown, Oh Miss Brown!" he cried, now with a big grin, "you wouldn't strap a poor little boy like me, would you? Especially when there's no evidence."

"You are such an insolent boy!" snarled Miss Brown. She stepped up on her stool, at which Peterson put his hand to his mouth to cover his grin. He (and she) remembered the last time she strapped him (only yesterday). He had moved his arm this way and that and she ended up almost chasing him around the staffroom unable to land the strap on his open hand. And when he did stop and put out his hand, she was so short she could not manage to raise the strap high enough above his hand in order to bring it down with any kind of hard blow. So this time, she had brought in a stepping stool to give her more height.

Up she stepped, one hand on her hip, the other brandishing the strap. "Come on, then, out with it young man!" she demanded.

Peterson burst out laughing. He almost said, "out with what?" but managed to hold it back, instead laughed uncontrollably, which of course incensed Miss Brown even more. He moved his hand this way and that, Miss Brown lunging forward and sideways, hampered by her having to remain on her stool. He laughed and jiggled around.

"Stand still!" she yelled.

But Peterson was by this time out of control. He waved his lanky arms around so that Miss Brown managed to lay a few strokes here and there, though not with the satisfying smack of leather on a bare hand that she liked.

"The left, now. Come on! You're getting six of the best for your insolence. Out with it!" she snarled, her face wrinkled with anger.

But then, the bell rang for classes, and almost relieved, Miss

Brown stopped and stepped down from her stool. But she was very frustrated and, completely losing control of herself, she swiped with her little, though quite strong arm when she was able to do a full swing, at Peterson's legs. The strap wrapped around his legs, and though they were protected by his gray school pants, it was nevertheless a shock of the unexpected, and Peterson let out a wail you would never believe.

Miss Brown immediately stood back, her hands on her hips, the strap dangling beside her body, no longer taut, relaxed, one could almost say as though after a bristling climax.

Peterson, for his part, backed off and fled to class. He had a story to tell that would amuse and delight all his mates.

Moral: Effective punishment requires the full cooperation of its recipient.