

liked me for years. But you being you, I couldn't tell. *I fold my arms, remembering all the times I saw him flirt with the girls in our grade and the grades before us. Really irritating.*

Him: Am I that much of a flirt?

Me: You're basically the song "I'm a Flirt" by R. Kelly.

Him: Who?

Me: Never mind. Anyways, I really like you too, so...

Him: So...

Me: Wanna grab a bite to eat?

Him: Sure. What time?

Me: 6-ish.

Him: Okay. Pick you up later. *I hang up first. Then I start giggling and laughing while doing my Snoopy victory dance. Mom comes into my semi-clean room, trying to figure out what in the world is going on, but I don't care, because I am the champion!*

MOVIN' ON

They're angry at me, but why? I say to myself. I'm just a ninth grader going to school like the rest of them. All I'm doing is walking to my first year of high school in my hometown of Little Rock. I see the police, and with every step I take, I feel like I'm going to fall into a bottomless pit of despair. I don't look into the soldiers' eyes because I can tell they're annoyed by us kids. They tense their bodies and are ready to grab their guns. I gulp out of fear.

I'm on the colored side of the sidewalk, so why are the other students behind me and following me? I walk faster, pretending I don't hear them

laughing, sneering, and yelling at me. It's a sunny day, but I know in reality it's all gray clouds, especially where I'm from. My friends aren't with me because I left early. I'm trying my hardest not to cry or pee my pants like a six-year-old; I know that would mean I'd lost my sense of pride.

"Maybe she's really white, but she's so dirty that no matter how hard she tries, the black gunk won't come off," one of the girls says.

"My dad said black girls are only good for one thing," says someone who sounds like a big white man. I glance to the side to see what he looks like. The student is wearing a cream-colored vest with khaki pants and expensive-looking brown shoes. Carrying notebooks under one arm, he waves his muscular right arm, motioning me to come his way. I don't trust his devil-like face. Not one bit.

"Think about why you're doing this," I say under my breath, trying to feel a little pride, but my fears are eating me alive. *I'm doing this because it will be a turn for history... if I can get through the school year. I want to see a change, but I really don't want to be the one who does it.*

"Hey, nigger!" he yells. I keep walking and pretend he's not there. He yells louder and louder, trying to force me to come toward him. He screams that awful word again.

"Leave me alone. Please," I say, just above a whisper. I hug my books like they are a shield from all their hatred

"Look, you little turd. I need you to run along to your colored community or wherever and leave before you get hurt."

I should be proud I'm one of the Little Rock Nine, but I'm so scared. I try to go to my happy place. "I'm at Granny's, eating her famous pecan pie," I whisper to myself.

One of the girls in the group sneers and pushes me hard enough that I fall into the bushes. I hadn't seen her coming. I lose my balance and scrape my knee in the process.

"Look at what you did! You ruined my new dress with your ugly black gunk," the girl says. "Next time watch where you're going!" she snarls, and glares an evil grin.

My heart is beating like a drum. *Ba-dum. Ba-dum.* The rest of my friends come along. "What are you doing on the ground, girl?" asks Tasha.

I couldn't bring myself to tell them what happened. "It's nothing,"

I say.

“Then what are we standing here for?” says a boy with a clever smile.

“We got stuff to learn and a bruise to fix up.”

I feel at ease. With my head held high, I walk with them and start a new chapter of my life.

