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A+Attitude

Speak Up

Something Special

Right Thing

No Fear

Stephanie Perry Moore

A+ ATTITUDE

Morgan Love Series

Book 1

MOODY PUBLISHERS

CHICAGO

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Chapter 1

No Pop

“Morgan Noelle Love! You have got to get out of the car and let go of my waist, girl. I’m going to be late. You’re squeezing me like I’m a lemon and you’re trying to make lemonade.” My dad said this to me as I hugged him tighter than I used to hold my teddy bear, Goldie, when I was in kindergarten. Now that I was going into the second grade, there was a lot going on. Can’t a kid get a break?

I am a big girl now. I don’t need Goldie to make sure I can sleep at night. I’m big enough to know that the bed bugs won’t bite. What I do need is my father, First-Class Captain, Monty Love. He’s leaving me again to go back to the U.S. Navy to serve our country off the coast of Africa.

We spent the last two months together, and they were so great. Now our fun time is over. It made me sad to hear him say good-bye, not knowing when he was coming back to Georgia. What will I do without my daddy?

Daddy said, “Morgan, sweetie, I’m serious. I have a plane to catch. It’s time for you to go inside your grandparents’ house. You see them up there looking out of the window. They can’t wait to spend time with you.”

I saw them all right. Every time I looked over at their pretty, two-story, red brick house, they jerked away from the window. They didn’t want us to think they were spying, but we saw them. And though I loved them very much, I knew that once I went inside their house, I’d lose my dad for a long while—and possibly forever. I could not let him go. I just couldn’t.

“I don’t want you to leave, Dad. My teacher last year told me that wars are serious fights. This might be the last time I ever see you.”

Time. I wanted more of it to share with my daddy, but it was quickly getting away from me. Just like when Papa watches a basketball game and his favorite team is behind and the clock is running out. That makes him real nervous.

Wanting Daddy to understand just how much he means to me, I had to do something real fast. The only thing I could think of at the moment was to shout out. I wanted the whole world to hear me: “I love my country, but why does my dad have to defend it? Couldn’t they find someone else?”

To my final attempt, Daddy calmly said, “Now, Morgan, we’ve gone over all of this before. It’s my job to serve in the military, but it won’t last forever. That reminds me, baby. I want you to know that all of the letters you

send me when I'm away really keep me going. It brings a huge smile to my face to know that I'm keeping my baby girl safe and protecting all the other little children of this great country. I'm so proud of the little lady you are growing up to be, and I know it's going to be hard for us to be apart. But, you know what? You have Jesus in your heart, and He's in my heart too. The Holy Spirit that we talked about is with us. So you don't have to worry about Daddy being safe because God is with me."

He reached into the backseat and pulled out an adorable pink basket tied with a bright pink matching bow. When he handed it to me, I said with surprise, "You got me a present?" My eyes lit up as I held it in my hands. "Wow, it's so beautiful!" All of a sudden, my voice sounded much happier than it had before now.

I couldn't wait another minute to see what was inside, so I ripped off the pretty wrapper. There in the basket was a cute pink notebook with glitter sparkles all over it. It was just the right size to fit in the front pocket of my book bag. On the side of the notebook there was a sparkly pink gel pen with a feather cap. Right away I wanted to use it to write on the fancy matching **stationery**.

Dad could see how excited I was, but I could tell by the look on his face that he was waiting to tell me something important. Pointing to the notebook, he said, "Now, Morgan, this is not a diary. It's your *word keep* book."

"My what?" I asked.

"Your *word keep* book. My baby girl is so smart. And

that's because you love learning new, big words. I want you to keep a log of those words. Write them down along with their meanings. Then use them in your own sentences when you write me letters on your new stationery. That way I'll know what you're learning."

"But I don't want to write letters to you, Daddy. I want you here with me when I learn the new words," I said, as I put the basket down beside me and looked out the window. I didn't want him to see my tears falling. "I want you here to protect me."

"Everything will be okay, Morgan. You have your grandparents here, a mom who loves you more than the world itself, and another daddy that . . ."

He kept talking, but I stopped listening. It's been two years since my parents sat me down and told me that they weren't going to be married anymore. Mommy has a new husband now. To make everything worse, I couldn't go home because she was in the hospital about to have a new baby.

I love my grandparents, Mama and Papa, so much. They made me feel special because I was their only grandchild to love. Soon they were going to have a new grandchild. I was my mom's baby, and now she was having a new baby. I wasn't going to be special Morgan Noelle Love anymore. Was it wrong to be upset?

My dad got out of the car and took my bags out of the trunk. He walked way ahead of me to my grandparents' door. At any other time I would be running ahead of him to get inside and play tea party with Mama or hide-and-seek

with Papa. But this day I had no pep in my step.

When they reached down to hug me, I just walked past both of them and went straight upstairs. I had my own bedroom at their house, but that didn't matter. My face was sadder than a girl who didn't get anything for Christmas.

They didn't even bother me. They both knew my heart was broken, and my dad couldn't help me feel better because he had a plane to catch.

When I looked out of the window, I saw Daddy standing by the porch, waving and blowing kisses up at me. I tried so hard to hold back more tears, but I lost the battle. Yes, I was mad at him for leaving me, but I couldn't let him leave without telling him one more time how I felt. So I ran downstairs as fast as I could, jumping over the bottom two stairs.

Everyone knew I would come back for a better goodbye. As I dashed to the door, Mama gave me a basket of goodies to hand to him. My Papa held the door open wide and there stood my dad with his arms stretched out. I jumped into them like I was bouncing on a trampoline.

He picked me up high in the air and spun me around. "You're my little lady, Morgan. Know that you are the most special girl in the world," he said to me.

Daddy kissed me on the forehead and took the basket. Before I knew it, he was gone. My heart felt sad. I already couldn't wait to see him again. But for now, I'd write to him as soon as I could.



“Morgan, let’s go, honey,” Mama called out to me the next morning.

This was the first day of the second grade, and I was supposed to be super excited. But I couldn’t find a way to be happy. Yeah, I had the cutest first-day outfit. I put on my new white shirt with its little pink stars and matching hot pink skirt. The pink and white sneakers Daddy bought me made my outfit look perfect. If no one knew before today that pink was my favorite color, they would know now. My new book bag was loaded with school supplies and I already knew Mama packed some yummy snacks in my lunch box. I couldn’t wait to eat the goodies inside.

I really tried to be excited, but there was another thing that made me sad. I wasn’t going to know many people at the new school. I was still living in DeKalb County, Georgia, close to the city of Atlanta. But we moved across town after my mom got remarried. Now we live in a new house near her new husband’s church. He is a minister at Double Springs Baptist Church.

My life was so messed up because of all the changes going on in everybody else’s life. Why did I have to change everything too? Now I had to go to school away from my friends. And that wasn’t right.

“Can you pick up the pace a little, Morgan? You’re walking slower than a snail,” Papa called out as we walked toward the car. “You know I have to get to my train.”

Papa was a train conductor, and Mama worked for the mayor of Atlanta. I knew I was moving really slow, but I

was so sad. I don't think they knew what I was feeling. Some first day of school! All the other kids had their parents take them to school. Why do my grandparents have to take me and not my own mommy?

"Morgan, do you like Papa's new car?" Mama asked me, as we were about to get inside.

I really wasn't paying it any attention. As far as I knew, it was probably like any other **vehicle**. But after I looked out from the corner of my eye, I had to admit the shiny red convertible was cool. I was just too upset and couldn't force a smile.

The world had done me wrong. My dad was halfway around the world. My mom was in the hospital about to bring home a new baby that I didn't want. I was going to a new school with kids I didn't know. I wasn't supposed to be happy. Not even riding in a new car and feeling my hair blowing in the summer wind was going to make me feel better. No matter what they did or said, no smile was going to be on my face.

As I climbed into the backseat, Papa held the door for me. When he said, "Ooh, Morgan, you're looking good, girl," I knew he was trying to cheer me up. So he went on talking. "That skirt and those little pants underneath work for you. You got it going on, girl!"

"Tommy!" said Mama. "Those are leggings."

"Legging. Pants. Stockings. They're all the same to me," he said.

"Leggings," she corrected him. "It's like I tell you one

day and you forget the next. Now, how many times do I have to tell you?” Mama scolded him, as she playfully nudged him in the arm.

They had the funniest way of fussing at each other. It wasn't like when I lived with my mom and dad. Even when I was small, their fussing made me see that it was hard for them to get along. But Mama and Papa's disagreements were funny. They seemed to have fun picking on each other. It was pretty great.

But still I wasn't going to let them make me laugh. I was too smart and knew that they were talking crazy just to get a smile out of me. It just wasn't going to work. Nope. Today was my mad day, and that was not going to change for anything.

When we pulled up to the school, all of the other kids ran to the car with their *oohs* and *aahs*. My Papa's chest stuck out about a foot long—twelve whole inches. Well, it didn't really stick out that far, but it sure looked like it. He acted really proud and stuff. He was showing the boys how to let the top down. The girls were checking out my Mama. They couldn't help but notice the huge smile on her face because she was so proud of Papa.

After Mama and I got out of the car one of the girls from the crowd came over to me and said, “Your grandparents are the coolest.” Then she raised her hand like I was going to give her a high-five or something.

Didn't she know that this was my mad day? I rolled my eyes at her and crossed my arms. I wasn't going to speak to

her or anyone else. This was not the day to mess with me, and I meant it.

“Hi, I’m Brooke,” the girl said, not caring that I wasn’t acting friendly.

“This is Morgan,” Mama said, as if I couldn’t speak for myself.

I looked back over my shoulder and gave her a look as if to say, *I don’t want you to be here. I don’t want you to speak for me, and I don’t want to make any new friends.* My grandmother just hung her head low like she gave up. She was always a **sassy** lady, and my dad said I got my personality from her. I couldn’t remember ever seeing her sad and not knowing what to say. Mama didn’t even respond and just walked away, **dejected**.

Brooke said, “That was mean. I couldn’t talk to my mom that way.”

“I didn’t *say* anything to her,” I said, setting the record straight.

“Well, if I even looked at my mom that way . . . ” Brooke said before I huffed and walked away from her.



Inside the classroom, this crazy and out-of-control boy was running and almost knocked me down.

“Hey, watch where you’re going!” I said to him, thinking, *Boys! Ugh! They’re so rough!*

He made me so mad that I had to look down at my clothes to make sure everything was okay. Then I said,

“You’d better not get me dirty. Stu—”

Before I could get out the rest of the word “stupid,” Papa called out, “Morgan Noelle Love! What has gotten into you?”

Frustrated, I turned to him and Mama. “Why are you both still here? Everyone else’s parents have left.”

“Because we love you, honey, and we want to make sure you settle in okay,” Mama replied.

“I’m okay. There’s Miss Nelson sitting at her desk, so you can leave.”

Papa asked, “How did you know her name was Miss Nelson?”

“All summer long, I knew whose class I’d be in, Papa. Ugh,” I said and stormed to my seat. It was a mean thing to say, and I should’ve just told him that Mommy gave me my new teacher’s name on the day she enrolled me in school.

A classmate tried to make up for me by telling my grandpa, “Don’t worry about her, mister. She’s just a girl, and sometimes they’re plain weird.” Later I learned his name was Trey.

But my granddad had a sad face, and I turned away so I wouldn’t see him. Finally, Mama and Papa left. I should have felt bad that I had such a stinky attitude. But with them gone, for the moment I felt a little better.

“Miss Love, I want to see you for a second,” Miss Nelson called to me. She was pretty and tall, with a calm voice. Her smile made me feel like I was looking at an angel, but I still knew I was in trouble. I hadn’t been in her

classroom for ten minutes before she needed to see me. No good was coming out of this.

“Yes, ma’am?”

“I just want you to know that you were very mean to your grandparents. I’ve watched you since you came into the room, and you’ve been mean to your classmates too. I don’t know what’s going on with you, young lady, but you’d better fix it quickly. In my classroom, we all get along. If you don’t want to do that, then we can take a nice trip to the principal’s office.”

Miss Nelson wasn’t playing around. She was spelling out exactly what she wanted me to know, as she continued, “So I suggest you zip that lip and take in what I’m saying to you. Now, we can either have a nice year or it can be a long and hard one—if you get on my bad side. Go back to your seat and figure out which way you want it to be.”

Gritting my teeth, I screamed on the inside. Miss Nelson didn’t know what I was going through and now she was going to force me to be nice. What was I going to do? So far, second grade was yucky.



Finally, it was almost the end of the first day of school. I kept catching Brooke looking over at me. Though I wasn’t rolling my eyes anymore, I wasn’t smiling either. I didn’t want to be her friend. I missed Kimberly and Jan at my old school. These new kids were going to take some getting used to.

Trey kept trying to make me laugh. He was making silly moves like he couldn't be still and saying raps that didn't **rhyme**. I couldn't understand why he was acting like such a clown.

Then Miss Nelson divided us into groups for the math team game. She made Trey captain of one team, and Brooke was captain of the other. Neither one of them picked me and that didn't feel good. I started thinking it wasn't cool for people not to like me. It kinda hurt to overhear kids saying, "Don't pick her. She's mean. If she's on our team, we'll lose for sure with her bad attitude."

With twenty-four students in our class, I was the last one sitting in my seat. It was Brooke's turn to pick. She looked at me and then looked away.

"Ha!" Trey said, laughing out loud. "You get Morgan."

Wow. The girl who clearly wanted to be my friend earlier didn't even want me to be on her team now.

I'll show them, I thought to myself.

The game was going to be a fun math review. Miss Nelson wrote an addition or subtraction problem on the board and the first team who got the answer right scored the point. I don't know what everybody else was doing for the summer, but I was on the money. Everywhere my dad and I went—like Six Flags or the World of Coca-Cola—we counted things like people, rides, animals, and even our steps.

The problem on the board was "Five elephants, plus six giraffes, plus three monkeys, is how many animals?"

Because of all the practice I'd had, I knew the answer was fourteen animals. I didn't have to count on my fingers like Trey was doing. And I didn't need to count the numbers aloud like Brooke.

"This is mental math. I know the answer," I told them.

Truly wanting to win, Brooke said, "Then tell us the answer."

"Why should I help you when you didn't even want me on your team? I should let the team lose just because you wouldn't pick me."

"Aw, she doesn't know the answer," said Kyle, another boy on our team.

"I sure do," I replied and sat back down in my chair to watch Trey's team clobber ours.

For mental math, there are some simple rules. Ten plus any single digit number adds a one in front of that number. For example, $10 + 6 = 16$. If you have a nine and add a single digit number to it, the sum is a one and one less than the single digit number. For example, $9 + 7 = 16$. Most equations you just need to practice and memorize. Then once you know it, it is mental math. For example, $8 + 7 = 15$.

Subtraction is easy as well. I used flash cards to practice learning them. Plus my dad and I practiced subtraction all summer with money. He'd give me a twenty dollar bill, and every time I asked for something that day money was taken from the twenty dollars. For example, if I wanted a soda that was \$2 and a burger that was \$4, I added those

together, which is \$6. Then my new equation was $\$20 - \$6 = \$14$. And that's what I had left over.

Most people in the class said they didn't study math over the summer and I could tell. It took both teams a while to get all the easy answers. Still, when the game was over, we'd lost big time. Miss Nelson assigned the losing team math worksheets for homework. Brooke and all the kids on our team were upset with me. But it wasn't going to bother me that we had to do math homework. I looked at that easy sheet and knew I could finish it in about five minutes.

When Miss Nelson said it was time for recess, everyone got up and cheered. I sat still. I guess it made me weird to like classwork. I liked learning more than having free time to run around and act crazy. But then Miss Nelson made me go out and have fun with the other kids. Everyone was running, smiling, and jumping. I did look kinda silly sitting on a bench with my arms folded.

So I whispered a prayer. "God, help me. I don't want to be so angry. It just doesn't seem fair. Everything that I didn't want to happen to me is happening even though I was good. My parents told me it wasn't my fault they weren't together anymore, but it hurt so bad to not have them together.

Besides, I've lived for this long without a baby brother or sister, why do I have to have one now? You're supposed to take care of me and love me. It doesn't seem fair. Can You put a smile on my face?"

“Who are you over here talking to?” Brooke asked, as she came and sat next to me.

I quickly turned away from her. “I’m talking to God. Is that a crime?”

“Okay, okay. Why do you have to be so mean? Do you think He’ll be happy with the way you’re acting?”

That was a good question. When my dad took me to Sunday school last week, we talked about Job. He was a man who had money, a big family, and happiness. But when Job lost everything he had, he didn’t get angry about it. This is what he said about it in Job 1:21, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.” It was one thing to read that, but was I supposed to live it?

Brooke kept talking to me. “I know you’re new here, and you’re probably upset that you can’t see your old friends too. But how do you think we feel? I’m mad that my parents couldn’t buy me a new outfit for my first day, and I really like how cool you’re dressed. But I’m not going to get mad at you because you have something I want. So don’t you be mad at me. Okay?”

“I’m not mad at you, Brooke.”

“Then quit acting like it. Nobody picked you today because you’ve been mean all morning. I don’t care what anybody says, everyone wants to have friends. Think about it.”

Then she got up to play with the other girls around us. I couldn’t wait for the day to end. I didn’t know how to tell

Brooke I wanted to be her buddy too. Even though I was going through some **horrible** things, I just didn't know how to fix my bad attitude. So I was left there by myself to sulk and be sad. My mouth was closed and I had no pep.

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

You see I'm using the **stationery** you got me to write you a letter. I miss you so much. My first day of school was not cool. Though Papa drove me there in his pretty new **vehicle** you'd love, I was a bit **sassy**. I'm just unhappy you're gone, and I don't want a baby brother. The first day was bad because no one picked me for the math team and I felt **dejected**. To be honest, I'm very **frustrated** that I'm not at my old school with my old friends. It's not cool to be at this school. That is a **rhyme**. Right now I feel **horrible** that I have to go back tomorrow.

Your daughter,
Mad, Morgan

Word Search

M O R G A N L U V D S C
J S T A T I O N E R Y A
A E C O M E Q T D H D N
Y K M O K Q A U N Y U D
D O M R E R L O I M Q E
E D L D T R Y Y K E P T
N R W S A S S Y E T U C
T B U C S C H O O L O E
O R X B E L C I H E V J
F T R E Y Z G D P X N E
S L R I G T H G I R B D
A T L A N T A R O C K S

DEJECTED

FRUSTRATE

RHYME

SASSY

STATIONERY

VEHICLE

Words to Know and Learn

1) **stationery** (stā'shə-nēr'ē) *noun*

Writing paper and envelopes

2) **ve·hi·cle** (vē'ī-kəl) *noun*

Something used to carry persons or things

3) **sas·sy** (sās'ē) *adjective*

Rude and disrespectful

4) **de·ject·ed** (dī-jĕk'tĭd) *adjective*

In low spirits; sad

5) **frus·trate** (frŭs'trāt') *transitive verb*

Feeling discouraged or baffled

6) **rhyme** (rīm) *noun*

A word that ends with the same sound as another word

7) **hor·ri·ble** (hôr'ə-bəl, hŏr'-) *adjective*

Very unpleasant; disagreeable; very bad

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Chapter 1

All Better

“Where are you going? I just know you don’t think you’re going with us, Morgan.” My new cousin Drake, who was my stepdaddy’s nephew, was acting like I had the **plague** or something.

Placing my hands on my hips, I said back with attitude, “Yes, I’m going. That’s why I’m getting my coat. Can you tell Daddy Derek to hold on a second, please?”

Since it was December, I also needed to grab my gloves and hat to keep warm. Just as I was heading quickly to my room, I felt somebody behind me stepping on my heel. I knew it was that rude Drake, and he didn’t even say that he was sorry.

“No. I won’t tell him that,” Drake said, as he continued to follow me.

“Ouch!” I yelled out. I turned to face him after he stepped on my heel a second time. “What’s your problem?”

Drake jumped in front of me so I couldn’t move. “You need to stay home. Okay? This is a time for me and my uncle to spend together. It’s called ‘man time.’ We’re going to the hardware store to get some paint, and that’s not a place for girls. Just stay here and wait for my sisters to wake up. Maybe y’all can bake cupcakes, or Christmas cookies, or something.”

“He doesn’t even know what color I want for my room, Drake. Get out of my way because I’m going,” I told him, as I pushed him to the side and went into my room.

“Ugh! You’re always ruining stuff,” Drake huffed, as he came into my room uninvited.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

I was in shock. I couldn’t believe it. Of all people, Drake was the one to talk about me messing up something? This was my first Christmas with my new brother and my new stepdad in our new house. And, because of him and his sisters, we weren’t alone. My new cousins were staying with us, and they were crowding my space.

Drake, who was two years older than me, was a pain worse than a loose tooth being pulled out. Samantha, who liked to be called Sam, was ten. She thought she was the next Teen Miss America. At first I used to admire how cute she always looked. But when she started taking up extra time in the bathroom every day, her primping was not cool. Sadie was a year older than me and we got along just fine.

The only thing was, she liked playing with dolls all the time. There were more things that I wanted to do, that I wanted to try, and that I wanted to learn.

“Just forget about tagging along, I told you. He knows what color pink to get for your room. Your mom wrote it all down. Now we’re ready to go and we figured out everything last night when we talked about our ‘man plan’ for today. You were nowhere in it, Morgan. Stay home!” Drake headed out of my room and slammed the door.

I backed into my bed and sat on it. My feelings at the time told me to put both of my hands under my chin and pout. I wanted to cry, but because I was a big girl, I decided not to.

I couldn’t do anything. I sure was mad at the fact that Drake was going with Daddy Derek and I wasn’t. At Thanksgiving dinner, Drake had been feeling **insecure** about not having his uncle in his life the way he wanted now that Daddy Derek had a new family. So I was the one who went out of my way to make Drake feel special.

And now that I wanted to be included in what they were doing, he didn’t want me to be. And that wasn’t fair. It wasn’t really okay, but I had to tell myself that so the tears wouldn’t come. I was holding them back pretty hard.



The only thing I could do was wait until Daddy Derek came back. Then we could have some special time of our own. Now, three hours had passed and I was becoming

impatient. I mean, what did they have to do, mix the paint too? Did they get lost trying to find the paint store?

Fifteen minutes later, I learned that wasn't the case because the two of them walked into the house with smiling faces. They had bags filled with items to do work in the yard and the house, along with tons of paint.

Daddy Derek called me over to see the paint sample for my room. When I saw the pretty shade of pink he bought, my mouth stretched with excitement from ear to ear. But then my smile quickly dropped when I wondered if I were going to be able to help paint it. If not, I wouldn't enjoy my room as much.

I followed Daddy Derek outside. "I can help you guys."

"Thank you, sweetheart, but I don't want you to have to do any heavy lifting. Drake and I can handle it. You go on back inside and help your mom," Daddy Derek said, patting me on the head.

Drake looked over at me and stuck out his tongue. I wanted to yank it, but I just walked back into the house. I thought about my dad, my real dad, who was serving our country in the U.S. Navy off the coast of Africa. I missed him so much, and I knew that if he were here, then he would let me help. Daddy always told me that girls could do anything guys can do. There were women serving in the Navy with him.

What did Daddy Derek think would happen? That I would break a nail or something? I was strong and just needed a way to prove it.

Throughout the day, I was told no every time I wanted to help. I couldn't help put up the fence. I couldn't help spread the pine straw. I couldn't help plant the flowers. I couldn't help organize the shelves in the garage. I couldn't help. I couldn't help. I couldn't help! What was the big deal? I wasn't going to get hurt or anything.

Pretty soon I got tired of trying and just gave up. The minute I walked in the house, Mom sent me right back out to get the mail.

Walking past the guys, I saw they were sweating from head to toe from all the hard work they were doing. Daddy Derek looked at me and said, "Hey, Morgan. I know you're glad you're not out here working this hard." I just stared at him.

"Uncle Derek, I'm thirsty," Drake said.

"Morgan, can you go and grab us a couple bottles of water?" Daddy Derek said to me, as if all I was good for was being the maid.

I ran to the mailbox to get the mail and went back inside. Mom was tending to Jayden so I laid the mail on the table beside her. Then I went to the kitchen and opened the refrigerator to grab the two waters. Running back outside, I handed one to Daddy Derek. I really wanted to throw Drake's water at his head because he had a smirk on his face. He was probably thinking that since I was a girl I had to be his servant, but I gave him the water anyway. It just made me so mad. I walked away feeling worse than a kid nobody wants on their team.

Later that night at dinner, I said nothing. My parents and cousins were talking so much they didn't need to hear my voice anyway. As soon as I was done eating, I asked to be excused from the table. Mom had taught me good manners so I asked if I could leave the table instead of just getting up and walking away.

A few minutes went by and Mom came up to my room. She looked at the finished walls and said, "Morgan, the paint smell is too strong. You don't need to sleep in here tonight. Your room looks great, though. Do you like it? I think it's a bold pink, but it's cute."

In an **uninterested** way, I said, "It's okay, Mom."

"Okay? Morgan you've been wanting this color for weeks. What's wrong? I know it's a lot having three extra kids around your age in the house, but it'll work out."

"I know, Mom. Their mother is a single parent, and she wanted to get away for the holidays. I understand that our present to her is to keep her kids. I'm fine with it and that's not what's bothering me."

"Well, what is bothering you?" she asked, stepping closer to me.

I stepped away from her. She was my mom and parents were supposed to know all about their kids—forward and backward. She must have seen me all day asking to help Daddy Derek and Drake. A part of me thought she'd tell Daddy Derek to let me help. But she didn't. And because I didn't wanna cause any **friction** between them, I just told her what she wanted to hear.

I said it again. “I’m okay, Mom. Just tired. Everything is cool.” I said it, knowing deep in my heart it wasn’t true.



The neighborhood we moved into was new and we were the first family to stay there. When we saw a moving truck parked outside, we got excited at the thought of new neighbors. My mom was thrilled to think she might find a new buddy and I was hoping they had kids my age. She had told me not too long ago that the **recession** was turning around and more people were starting to buy new homes.

When Mom and Daddy Derek went down the street to greet the family, Sadie turned to me and said, “I guess you’re bummed out, huh?”

“Why do you say that?”

“I know you were hoping for them to have daughters but they’ve got boys.” She twisted her face as if boys had diseases.

I really just wanted them to have kids, period. I didn’t need any other girlfriends because I had Brooke and Chanté at school and Sadie and Sam at home. I did want to have some adventure and play outside more. Sometimes girls don’t want to play rough. I don’t mean wrestling or anything like that. Just somebody to play a game of kickball with or go bike riding with. When I saw the two boys running around with a soccer ball, I wanted to go over even more.

“Let’s go and meet them,” I said.

Sam said, “You guys can go on. I need to curl my hair.”

“But Mom said you’re not supposed to curl your hair, Sam,” Sadie said.

“Well, Mom’s not here, is she?” Sam snapped back at her younger sister.

Drake, Sadie, and I walked a couple of houses down to meet the new neighbors.

“Oh, and here comes our crew now,” I heard Daddy Derek say. “This is our daughter, Morgan, and our niece and nephew, Drake and Sadie. Where’s Sam?”

“Don’t ask,” Sadie said, rolling her eyes.

Daddy Derek laughed. “We have an older niece too, Samantha. Guys, meet the London family.” Pointing at the boys, he said, “These are their sons, Antoine and Alec. You all should stay out here and play for a while.”

“Yeah, but not too much longer. I’m sure they need their boys to help them move some things around,” Mom added.

“I don’t mind helping,” I said before Daddy Derek cut in.

“Morgan, I’m sure they’ve got it. You just play for a while and get to know each other a bit.”

I don’t think he knew how much that comment hurt my feelings. Why did he think I couldn’t do anything?

“Can y’all play dodge ball?” the older boy asked.

“Yeah,” Drake, Sadie, and I all answered at once.

“Well, it was nice meeting you folks. We should get together soon,” Mom said. Then all the grownups left us alone.

All of a sudden, the two boys, who seemed nice when their parents were around, turned into animals. Antoine picked up the ball and threw it hard at Drake's head.

"Ow! We're not even ready yet," Drake said.

Antoine yelled, "Ah, come on! What are you, a wimp or something? I know that didn't hurt."

"No, it didn't hurt," Drake said, rubbing the side of his head. "I just wasn't ready. That's all."

When Sadie saw Alec and Antoine jumping up and down like they couldn't wait to hit us even harder with the ball, she said, "I don't wanna play this game. You guys play too rough."

"Let's play! If you can't stand the heat then you better get out of the game," Antoine called out.

Sadie sat on the curbside and started cheering us on. I was ready to take them on and was dodging all of their balls. It was easy enough because it didn't seem like they were throwing them at me too hard. But they were trying to hurt Drake for real.

Then, Alec threw the ball at Drake's face and hit him in the eye. He yelled, "Touchdown!" as Drake stumbled and fell to the ground.

"Wait a minute. We're not playing football," I said to Alec.

Antoine said, "Y'all are playing whatever we wanna play. I told you if you couldn't stand it, then get out of the game. You decided to stay in, so deal with it."

"I'm not dealing with nothin'," Drake said, as he tried to

get up. But Antoine pressed his foot down hard on Drake's chest.

I was really getting mad at my cousin. He was the one who kept saying girls couldn't do this and girls couldn't do that. But now he had his hands full because he had run into some really bad boys. It wasn't right how rough they were playing. And I knew I should help my cousin out and not let them mess with Drake.

"Get your foot off him!" I yelled.

"Man, you've gotta have that little girl take up for you because you can't take up for yourself. I told you, Alec, before he walked over here, that he was a girl," Antoine teased.

"For your information—" I started to say before Drake grabbed me.

He'd had enough and was pulling me toward the house. "Stop! I'm talking to them. I don't need you to defend me. Okay?" he said.

"I'm trying to help you. I'm going right in there and telling my mom," I said.

"No, you're not," Drake said, as he stood in front of me and looked at me with a very mean face. "Did you hear what those guys just said to me? They called me a girl. Man! I didn't even wanna come here for Christmas anyway."

I watched Drake walk faster. And even after how he treated me, I was sorry he felt so bad. Maybe I shouldn't have said anything to help him. I really didn't know how to make it all better, but what I tried to do wasn't helping.



“Morgan, we thought you wouldn’t ever want to come back over here. With all those kids and the loads of fun you’re having at your house,” Papa joked, “I just knew you’d forgotten about your old grandpa.”

He didn’t know how happy I was to be spending the day with my grandparents on Christmas Eve. I bet it did seem like fun to have three other kids in the house, but that was far from the truth.

Sam didn’t wanna play at all. She just primped in front of the mirror all day long like her beauty was going to change any second. Every chance she got she was worrying about her long, black hair and making sure that her lip gloss was shiny enough.

Drake didn’t wanna play with me, thinking it would make him look bad. He was still upset about what happened with the new boys down the street, so he just played alone. Sadie and I could talk about a lot of things, but I was tired of making the Barbie dolls talk. I was tired of playing house. Sadie loved helping my mom with baby Jayden, and my mom liked having a helper who was **enthusiastic**.

Every time Mama and Papa asked if I could come over, my mom would tell them I had company. Finally, after begging her to take me over to see my grandparents, she finally dropped me off. Mom could tell I needed the break, but I couldn’t stay overnight. Though my visit was only for the day, it was still fun for me. Mama and Papa were like

my best buddies, and I had missed them.

“Your mom will be here to get you soon, young lady.”

Papa was pleased that we had done a lot together and asked me, “Did you enjoy going to the movies and shopping at the mall? Did you have fun playing board games?” He really made me feel good, knowing all the things that I liked to do. “Anything for my baby girl,” he said.

“Papa, can you call my mom and tell her I don’t wanna go home?”

Mama had been listening, but when she heard me say that, she slid over next to me. Putting her arm around my neck, she said, “Okay. You don’t wanna go home and this is Christmas Eve. Why? What’s going on?”

I didn’t say anything. “Is anybody hurting you, Morgan?” Papa said, looking concerned.

I knew I had to speak up then because he was ready to grab his coat and keys to head over there. “No, I’m okay. I’m fine.”

“That’s not an ‘I’m fine’ sound,” Mama replied. “How about I bake some cookies before your mom comes and we can talk about it?”

“Okay,” I said in a sad tone, like I’d lost my favorite toy.

Mama was a really good cook and her desserts were the best. Soon I had some delicious warm cookies set on a plate in front of me. My eyes grew big when I saw the shapes of Christmas trees, reindeer, and crosses, all dazzled with red and green colored sprinkles. Mama knew just how to get me to open up.

“Tell us, Morgan. You know we can talk about anything. It must be rough with all those kids over there. Are they getting in your way? Are they bullying you? What’s wrong, baby?”

“Oh,” I huffed. “It’s just . . .”

“What? It would’ve been a nicer Christmas if y’all would’ve been by yourselves, wouldn’t it?” Papa said as Mama poked him. “I told my daughter it wasn’t a good idea to let Derek’s nieces and nephew come over there on y’all’s first Christmas as a family. That’s a lot on everybody.”

“Hush up, now!” Mama told him.

“Papa, do you remember how you let me meet your coworkers that day?”

“Yep, I sure do. A lot of my coworkers are still talking about how little Morgan has such good manners. It makes me so proud to hear that.”

“And how about when you let me help you fix things around here?”

“Yeah. I gotta show you how to do stuff like I did with your mom.”

“Well, that’s just it. Daddy Derek doesn’t let me do anything. He looks at me like I’m some little girl that could break her hand whenever I try to help do things. Drake is getting on my nerves. He wants all of Daddy Derek’s time because he doesn’t have a dad of his own. Sure, it’s okay for them to spend time together, but Drake doesn’t wanna share. Sometimes I think Mommy doesn’t want me to have any fun! I’m a girl, and I like being a girl, but girls can do

lots of things. I don't wanna just sit around painting my nails all day long like Sam."

"Tell that to your grandma," Papa whispered.

"Hush," Mama snapped.

I looked at both of them. "I'm serious."

All of a sudden, Mommy walked into the kitchen and picked up on what we were saying, "You're serious about what? Morgan, are you ready to go? I don't have much time. Ooh, Mom, you baked cookies," she said, grabbing one. Just like that she stopped rushing and sat down next to me.

They were so good with milk. But I was too upset to eat more right then. I had to tell Mom what was on my mind.

"Mommy, may I spend the night?" I asked.

Mama spoke first, "Yes, maybe she should stay here because she's telling us some things that we need to address."

No, no, no, I thought to myself. I wanted Mama to stop talking. My grandparents knew the rule: whatever we talked about stayed between us. And now they were going to break it.

"This is very important though, Morgan," Mama said.

Mom asked, "What did Morgan tell you?"

"She just feels left out because she's not allowed to help out around the house. And you and your husband need to know that Morgan likes to help," Mama said.

My mom looked at me and said, "Oh, Morgan, I didn't


know you wanted to help out. Why didn't you say something?"

"I didn't think I had to, Mom. That's my room, and you know I wanted to paint it. Helping with the work is part of the fun. What I didn't wanna tell you is that Drake was saying Daddy Derek didn't want me to help. I just didn't want there to be any problems."

"Sometimes you gotta talk about things. Sometimes you need to open up, and that's okay. You're not being a tattletale when you express your feelings. We can't fix something when we don't know something is wrong. We love you, Morgan. Don't feel like you have to keep anything from me," Mom said and kissed my cheek. "Daddy Derek does like having you around to help him."

Papa whispered to me, "See, we had to tell. Now everything will be all better."

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

Sometimes boys can be mean and they treat girls like we have the plague. Is it that some boys are insecure because girls may be stronger than them? Well, whatever it is, I'm getting impatient with boys thinking they can push me around. I can play dodge ball and football. And I'm uninterested in playing with Barbie dolls all day, though I do want a new doll for Christmas. I just wish you were here to help me with the friction between me and my cousin Drake. I do feel sorry for him because his mom has to work two jobs to make up for the one she lost because of the recession. Pray for us because we're not that enthusiastic to be around each other.

Your daughter,
Tough Girl, Morgan

Word Search

U M F S I L V E R N O C
C N R P E O X Y G E I G
H C I N A U T A B T M O
E A C N E H G A S L P L
I R T L T O N A N M A D
N B I E P E I T L E T C
S O O A Q S R R S P I O
E N N D U Z K E A Y E P
C O Z H Z I N C S O N P
U E T A R G O N D T T E
R N E N O I S S E C E R
E H Y D R O G E N L N D

ENTHUSIASTIC

FRICITION

IMPATIENT

INSECURE

PLAGUE

RECESSION

UNINTERESTED

Words to Know and Learn

1) **plague** (plāg) *noun*

A widespread affliction or calamity

2) **in·se·cure** (in'sī-kyūr') *adjective*

Not sure or certain; doubtful

3) **im·pa·tient** (im-pā'shənt) *adjective*

Unable to wait patiently or tolerate delay; restless

4) **un·in·ter·est·ed** (ŭn-in'trī-stīd) *adjective*

Without an interest in a particular thing

5) **fric·tion** (frīk'shən) *noun*

Conflict; disagreement between people or groups of people

6) **re·ces·sion** (rī-sěsh'ən) *noun*

A period of reduced or declining economic activity

7) **en·thu·si·as·tic** (ěn-thū'zē-ăs'tīk) *adjective*

Having or showing great interest

Stephanie Perry Moore

SOMETHING SPECIAL

Morgan Love Series
Book 3

MOODY PUBLISHERS
CHICAGO

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Chapter 1

Cruel World

“Our class has got this! We’re gonna win Field Day! Come on!” Trey said, as he tried to cheer us on.

“Yeah,” Billy said. “Look at Mr. Wade’s class. We gotta go against them in the relay race. And look at that big girl over there. She looks like a hippopotamus!”

Everyone in my class started laughing but me. I didn’t even know who they were talking about, but I knew deep inside of me that it was wrong to laugh at people. It’s not fun being on the outside looking in, and two times this year I was on the outside. When my classmates laughed at me, it hurt worse than when I skinned my knee really bad in recess one day in my kindergarten class.

At the beginning of the school year, I got a lot of attention because they kept telling me that I was smart. But now it seemed like nobody cared that I was smart. And that

doesn't feel so good. It shouldn't matter that no one thinks I'm special, but seeing that there are two other ways to get attention—I needed one of them.

For one, you had to be really cute, like my friend Brooke. A lot of people started paying extra attention to her. At first, she always wore her hair up in a pony tail, but lately it's been flowing down her back. And it's pretty too. A perm makes my hair pretty, but not like Brooke's. She has hair like a baby doll.

The other way people stand out in the class is if they make jokes and act funny so kids will laugh. But I'm not good at poking fun at people. It's not that I want to be such a good girl; I just don't think hurting anybody's feelings is the right thing to do.

Finally, it was my turn to run in the relay race. And, guess what? It was between me and the girl who was bigger than everybody else in the second grade. Her name is Tara.

Billy handed me the baton and shouted, "You'd better smoke her, Morgan!"

We took off running. Right away, Tara started breathing hard, and I just kept going. We had to run really far, and when I reached the finish line, Tara was nowhere in sight. Though I didn't want her to catch up with me, I hoped she was okay.

Both of our classes didn't even wait to see if she was all right. They just started cracking jokes about her until I didn't wanna hear anymore.

"Maybe if she let some air out of that balloon she could

run faster,” one boy said.

“Don’t sit beside her at lunch. She’ll eat her food and yours,” another girl said.

They kept laughing at her as she finally made it to the finish line. The kids in Tara’s class were really mad at her too. I didn’t say anything and just moved along with my class.

“I’m so glad you beat that girl. If you had let that big girl beat you, we would never let you hear the end of it,” Billy told me.

It was time to take a water break, and I saw Tara standing alone with tears in her eyes. I went over to her, wanting to say something nice.

“What?” she asked me. “You got some more jokes you wanna say to me? I’m standin’ right here. So you don’t have to talk behind my back.”

“I wasn’t makin’ jokes about you,” I said to her.

“You were laughin’, and that’s just the same. You think I’m happy about my size? I know I’m the biggest girl in second grade. I don’t need kids laughin’ about it. It’s not even my fault.”

“What do you mean?”

“At home it’s just my mom, my older sister, and me. My mom works late so she’s never there when we get out of school. She brings home fast food, and I’m eating at ten o’clock every night. By that time I’m starvin’. So I eat too fast, and I don’t take time to **digest** my food. The doctor said eatin’ late isn’t a good idea. But when you haven’t had

much to eat all day, you take what you can get,” Tara explained with a sad look in her eyes.

I really wanted her to know that I cared about her feelings, so I asked, “Have you tried exercising?”

“Sometimes I try. But when I do, people around me laugh like they’re perfect and I’m not.”

Tara was getting more and more upset. “Why are people always tryin’ to pick on me? They need to leave me alone. Everyone has somethin’ they need to work on. I think it’s mostly their **character**.” Then she shoved by me and walked to her class.

Just then, Brooke and Chanté came over to me.

“What did that big girl want?” asked Brooke.

“Don’t call her that!” I snapped back.

“Well, she is a big girl,” Brooke said, spreading her arms and making wide circles.

Very sadly, I said, “You guys made her cry.”

“Well, she needs to lose some weight,” Chanté said, with no sad feelings for Tara.

“What if she’s tryin’ to lose weight but it isn’t working? What if she doesn’t have **healthy** foods at home so she can eat right? How would you feel if you had people makin’ fun of you all the time?”

“Why would people laugh at me?” asked Brooke. She added proudly, “I look good!”

I just shook my head and walked away. My two best buddies weren’t listening to me at all. We had hurt someone’s feelings and they didn’t even care.

I wished I could take back all of the insults and jokes that Tara heard that day. But the only thing I had wanted was for me to be popular. We were all being mean by only caring about ourselves. Jesus wouldn't be pleased with how any of us were acting.



“If Alec is going to be my partner, then I'm not doing it,” Trey said boldly. Miss Nelson was pairing us up for the three-legged race.

There were three other second grade classes, and our class was in the lead with the most points. We didn't lead by much, and two classes were trailing us close. If we didn't win the three-legged race and tug-of-war, then we would lose Field Day. We all had to work together if we wanted to win.

Right after Trey spoke up, Billy called out, “Me either. If he's in the three-legged race, then I'm not doing it.”

“Same for me,” Brooke said, as she stood by Trey. He smiled wider than if he was getting his teeth cleaned at the dentist.

Miss Nelson handed Alec the tie he was supposed to use in the race, but Alec threw it down. “No big deal. Everybody knows I'm the best athlete in this class. Win or lose without me—I don't care!”

Even though he said he didn't care, Alec sure looked like he was hurt. He was really upset. His voice was usually strong, but it didn't sound that way now. Alec started to walk off, but I stood in his way before he could go far.

“Wait! Alec, we need you,” I pleaded.

Trey huffed and said, “No, we don’t.”

“Alec, where are you going?” Miss Nelson called out, as he dashed around me and took off.

Walking away from our class, Alec hollered back, “I’m not playin’ with them!”

“Get back here, young man,” Miss Nelson said to him. But he just sat down on a nearby concrete stump.

When Miss Nelson went over to talk to Alec, I turned and asked Trey, Brooke, and Billy, “What’s wrong with y’all?”

“Don’t even start, Morgan. That boy pushed us around for months. The last thing I wanna do is be his friend or be tied up next to him. He might trip me and make me fall just for the fun of it,” said Trey.

I said, “But you gotta talk to him.”

“I don’t gotta do anything.”

But I wasn’t ready to give up, so I tried again. “I’m sure if you talked to him, you’d see.”

“See what?” he asked.

Ugh! I just blew out real hard, rolled my eyes, and folded my arms. There was so much more I knew about Alec than anybody else, but my parents wouldn’t like it if I ever said anything. I knew that Alec’s dad had lost his job and that made him turn into a really mean person. So, I felt bad for Alec. Their dad had screamed and yelled at Alec and his brother so much that they turned around and were mean to other people.

Because I understood why Alec had acted the way he

did, I wasn't mad at him anymore like the rest of them. And if Trey knew, he'd stop being mad too. Besides, the other kids in my class wouldn't be upset with Alec if Trey changed his mind about all this. I wanted all the meanness to stop. I wanted us to have some peace as a class. But I didn't know how to make that happen. I didn't know how to help us all be friends. This was so hard.

"Why do you keep takin' up for him, Morgan?" Billy asked. "You must like him or somethin'."

"I don't like boys . . . not like that anyway." I shook my head at Billy's crazy idea.

Trey looked over at Brooke, and she smiled. I didn't know what was going on, but Brooke and I needed to talk. Everything Trey said, she went along with. She really had no excuse for being mad at Alec. I forgave her, and she should forgive him. Besides, Alec was mostly mean and stuff to the boys more than the girls.

"Brooke, can I talk to you?" I asked.

"No," Trey answered for her. "She's gonna be my partner in the three-legged race."

I grabbed her hand real tight and said, "Trey, you be Billy's partner."

"Ouch! Morgan, that hurt," Brooke said. I let go of her hand when we were away from the others.

"What's goin' on with you, Brooke?"

"What do you mean? I don't like Alec, and you shouldn't either. He didn't even tell Trey he was sorry."

"How do you know that?"

“Well, Trey said he didn’t.”

“Alec needs friends too, Brooke.”

“Alec should’ve thought of that before he was mean to everybody.”

“I forgave you, and you need to forgive somebody else. Think for yourself, and stop doin’ what other people want you to do.”

“Morgan, I’m glad we’re friends again, but you want me to think like you. You want me to be just like you. You’re talkin’ about me following Trey but you want me to follow you. I don’t wanna be Alec’s friend right now, and that’s my choice. He wasn’t a nice person, and I’m not going to be nice to him because you want me to. Okay? Now the race is about to start. Are you going to be my partner so we can go after the other team and win the race?”

I nodded and followed her over to where everyone was getting ready for the race to take place. When I looked over at Alec, he had his head down. I was still **determined** to find a way to make him feel like part of our class. Yes, he’d been mean, but there was a reason. Most of the class was just being rough on him, and they needed to stop. After all, we were going to the third grade soon and we needed to start growing up a little more.

When I thought, *what would Jesus do?* I knew the answer right away. Bottom line: I was not going to give up on Alec. And if Jesus were here in person, He would help us all to act nice toward each other. So since I was here, I had to be like Him.



Since we were having so much trouble getting along with each other, we lost the three-legged race. Now our class was tied with Mr. Wade’s class. The tug-of-war contest would crown the champions of Field Day.

There was a ten-minute break before the big event. Our class still wanted to win, so everyone huddled around so Trey could give us a pep talk. It wasn’t my idea, but I went along with it.

“Okay, now. We need to get our act together, guys. We need our five strongest boys and our five toughest girls out on the rope. We gotta win for the class. We can do it! All we need to do is **participate** and pull together so we can win!”

Before he could finish telling us what to do, which was getting on my nerves because nobody made him class captain, Miss Nelson stepped into the middle of our group.

“Guys, you have one classmate who’s sitting over there alone and wants to join in. The rule is that everybody is supposed to participate in at least one event, and Alec hasn’t done one. Somebody had better go over there and talk to him, or the coach will **disqualify** our team.”

Miss Nelson didn’t even have to ask twice. I dashed right over to Alec. I didn’t care what anyone else had to say or what they thought about it. But, as soon I got to him, he let me know that he didn’t want to hear what I had to say.

“What do *you* want?” Alec said, turning his back to me.

I stepped over in front of him and said to his face, “Alec, we really need you so we can win.”

“No, you don’t. You’re just sayin’ that to make me feel better.”

“No, really. Miss Nelson just said that everyone has to participate in at least one event or we can’t win. I’m not makin’ this up.”

“But they don’t want me, and I don’t wanna be anywhere I’m not wanted.”

“I’ve seen you and your brother playin’ all kinds of games in the neighborhood. You know you’re the bomb athlete, Alec. Why would you let someone tell you that you’re not?”

“Because . . . I deserve it! Okay?” he said, just before he got up to walk away from me.

But I wasn’t going to let him get away with it. “No! Let’s talk, Alec. Why do you have to run away and act like such a baby?”

He stopped and turned back to me. “Why do you care anyway, Morgan?”

“Because if they just knew everything that happened to you then they’d know why you acted the way you did.”

“No way! I’m not tellin’ them any of my business. Think about it, Morgan. My dad was goin’ through a tough time, and he was hard on me. But he didn’t come to school with me and treat people bad. I did that on my own. And if it wasn’t for how I treated people, then maybe I’d have some friends. But maybe next year will be better. I’m tired

of actin' tough and I wanna change. I wanna be nice so kids will like me."

He was making a lot of sense. Just because someone was rough on you didn't mean you had to be rough on other people. Maybe sitting over here alone had helped him to think about it.

"Have you told them that you're sorry?" I asked.

He shrugged his shoulders like he didn't know.

"What kind of answer is that?"

"I don't know. I tried to talk to them but they don't wanna talk to me. I probably said I'm sorry. Why?"

"You don't have to make anybody like you, Alec. But if you really wanna make friends, then be real. Talk to people. Haven't you been bored sittin' here by yourself watchin' Field Day all day by yourself and not havin' any fun?"

"Yeah. We could've won that three-legged race," Alec said with a grin.

"Okay, so can we do tug-of-war now, please?" I asked, just as I heard Miss Nelson calling both of us.

He smiled and said, "Cool."

We jogged over to the rest of the class. Miss Nelson put Alec and Trey at the back of the line. I was in front of Trey. Brooke was in front of me. Billy was in front of her. The rest of the kids, along with Chanté, were closer to the front.

Waiting for the whistle to blow, we were holding on tight.

"You know I don't want you to play, right?" I heard Trey say to Alec.

“Yeah, but you like to win even more. And with me on the team, we can win.”

The next thing we knew, the coach, Mr. Bradley, blew the whistle.

“Pull!” Billy yelled out. “We’re goin’ forward, pull back hard!”

“I don’t care if we lose,” Trey said, not really meaning it.

“Hey, man,” Alec told him. “I’m sorry I hurt you. There was a lot goin’ on at my house, and let’s just say I’ve got a lot to learn. But I won’t mess with you anymore, I promise. Besides, you showed me somethin’. I’m not the only tough guy at school.”

Trey laughed at that. “Yeah. I was tired of you pushin’ me around and tellin’ me what to do.”

“Well, let’s just say I got the message,” said Alec.

Finally, when the two of them stopped talking, I said, “Okay, so y’all need to pull! We wanna win!”

Then Trey and Alec both pulled as hard as they could. Everybody was trying really hard. We kept pulling until Mr. Wade’s class crossed over the line—and we won! Hooray! Miss Nelson’s second grade class was the Field Day champs, and all was right with the world!

After the game was over, Trey started talking to Alec, and everyone else did too. Alec, Trey, Brooke, Billy, Chanté, and I went to the cool-off area to get some snow cones. We had earned them, and we were ready to enjoy those flavored ice drinks. They’re so yummy!

As the group stood around the table eating our icy reward, the special education class was finishing their last race. I hadn't spent a lot of time with kids who have special needs. But a few of the kids were standing around the table with us, waiting on their cool treats. Some of the kids in our group started laughing at this one kid named Tim. As he ran toward us, one of his knees bumped up against his other knee. The kids were making one joke after another about him.

"Freak!" Some girl called out that **cruel** word, as Tim made it to the snack table.

Everyone started laughing at that. I really don't know why I did it, but I laughed with them and said, "Yeah, he really is a freak." I guess I was trying too hard to fit in with the other kids.

The next thing I knew, Tim was standing in front of me screaming and knocking over the treats. He knew we were all laughing at him, and he had heard me call him that terrible name. It didn't matter that another girl said it before me. In his mind, it was all my fault. I felt bad that I was part of such a cruel world.

Letter to Dad

Dear Dad,

I hope you are taking good care of yourself. I've learned that I can't eat late at night. I need time for my food to digest before I go to sleep.

School is almost over, and today I learned a lot about what character is. I know that you must be a good person at all times. But I helped people today and I hurt people too. This one girl is not healthy and needs to lose weight. The class picked on her, but I tried to stand up for her. But later I made fun of a boy with special needs.

I was determined to do better, and I got Alec to join us in the tug-of-war game. That was good because the principal would disqualify us if we didn't let Alec play. The class learned we all needed to participate, and we won.

Kids can be cruel, Dad. I'm one of those kids, but I'm trying to be better.

Your daughter,
A lot to learn, Morgan

Word Search

R E A D U N G G O O D B
O O K S T H A T S B S T
R J Y F I L A U Q S I D
E P A R T I C I P A T E
S E H M Q U H C P E P N
O R E O U C A R A Z A I
L R A R I X R E P I T M
U Y L G L D A U A R C R
T S T A T E C L E P I E
I J H N S M T B J L C T
O A Y D I G E S T Z I E
N M O M O O R E L E A D

CHARACTER

CRUEL

DETERMINED

DIGEST

DISQUALIFY

HEALTHY

PARTICIPATE

Words to Know and Learn

1) **di·gest** (dī-jĕst) *verb*

To break down food so it can be used by the body

2) **char·ac·ter** (kă'rək-tər) *noun*

A person's behavior showing goodness and honesty

3) **health·y** (hĕl'thē) *adjective*

Being well and not sick

4) **de·ter·mined** (dĭ-tŭr'mĭnd) *adjective*

Showing purpose; intent; having a firm goal

5) **par·tic·i·pate** (păr-tĭs'ə-pāt') *verb*

To take part in something

6) **dis·qual·i·fy** (dĭs-kwŏl'ə-fĭ') *verb*

To keep someone or something from joining a team or group for not following the rules

7) **cru·el** (krŭ'əl) *adjective*

Causing pain or suffering

Stephanie Perry Moore

RIGHT THING

Morgan Love Series

Book 4

MOODY PUBLISHERS

CHICAGO

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Chapter 1

Some Good

“No, Morgan, you are not going to watch that scary movie. It’s not allowed in our home and you know that,” my mother said firmly.

“Oh, come on, Mrs. Randall,” Brooke begged. “Pleeeeeease. It’ll be all right.”

“No, sweetheart. It won’t be all right. As I said, Morgan is not allowed to watch certain types of programs. I **recommend** you guys pick something else to watch. I want you girls to have a good time, but the rules are the rules. Morgan thinks she can handle those creepy movies, but she can’t.”

I went up to Mom and placed my arm around her waist to soften her up. “I can handle them, Mommy. I promise. I won’t be afraid.”

She stepped back from me, like I had a bad cold or something. “There’s more to it, Morgan. That movie is

rated PG-13 and it has scenes in it that you aren't ready to see yet."

"But my mom lets me watch them at home. And Morgan and I are the same age. Please, Mrs. Randall," Brooke pleaded again.

"No, girls. I said no and that's final," Mom said in her strong voice.

Both Brooke and I stomped off in a huff. We stomped hard. We were too upset at the moment to be respectful.

"You know what. Come here," Mom said, not being too happy with us. "I'm glad that you're staying over tonight, Brooke. And your mom told me that I could speak to you like I speak to Morgan. You're in my house and she knows I care about you. So, you little ladies need to listen up good. You must be polite when an adult says no. It's not the end of the world. Just find something else to do. And if you girls don't hurry up and turn those frowns into smiles, I'm going to put you to work."

"Work? I cleaned up everything," I said to Mom, still frowning.

"No, that *Summer Bridges* book I bought for you to work in over the summer has several pages that you haven't done. How about you and Brooke go and do that. Come back to me after a while so I can check how much you've done."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, trying hard not to show her how unhappy I was.

When Brooke and I went to my room, Brooke com-

plained, “Wow, I can’t believe she won’t let us watch the movie.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I’m a big girl and I want her to quit acting like I’m a baby. She keeps treating me like I’m little and can’t handle anything. It makes me so angry.”

“Well, you have to show her that you’re a big girl instead of just telling her.”

Looking around my room for the workbook, I said, “What do you mean, Brooke?”

“Here’s the deal. When she goes to sleep, we’ll watch the movie anyway,” Brooke said, as she spotted the workbook on my bookcase and handed it to me.

“Huh?”

“That’s how I got my mom to let me watch them. At night I would watch a movie and in the morning when she woke up I would tell her all about it.”

“She didn’t get mad that you watched somethin’ you weren’t supposed to watch?”

Brooke looked at me and smiled. “Well, I never really asked her.”

“What if we get caught?” I was really scared because the whole plan sounded so risky.

“If she’s asleep, how is she gonna know?” Brooke said, giving me a slick look and a wink.

Shrugging my shoulders I said, “I don’t know.”

“Let’s just get these pages over with,” Brooke said, as she snatched the book away from me and opened it to the last page I’d done. “We’ll have her all buttered up so when

she goes to sleep, she'll never know."

I heard what my friend was saying and I didn't want Brooke to think staying over at my house was lame. I wanted her to know that I'm cool and so is my mom. But I should have known that Mom wouldn't let me do everything Brooke could do at her house. We were both growing up, and I just wished Mom would accept that.

But for now, there was only one problem for me. After Mom said no, I didn't think I should do something that she told me not to do. Then again, I couldn't help but wonder, *Would it really be that bad?*

I looked at the *Summer Bridges* book, and my mom was right. I did have a lot of pages left to finish and summer was nearly over. I was going back to school next week to be in the third grade! I was definitely not a baby anymore. The first page we turned to was about **homophones**.

"H-o-m-o-p-h-o-n-e-s. Homophones."

"Okay, what are homophones?" Brooke asked me.

"They are words that sound the same but mean something different. Like *your*, which means you own something. Or *you're*, which stands for 'you are.'"

Brooke said, "Oh, I get it. And like *two*, the number two and the word *too*, which means 'also' or 'very.'"

"Exactly. And you use the pronoun *their* when you're talking about more than one person. Or the word *there*, when you're talking about another location. Or the word *they're*, which is short for 'they are.' Whew!"

“Wow. Homophones are tricky.”

“Yep.”

Brooke looked at the workbook. “Here’s a sentence: *They herd/heard that sailors leave their families and sail away.*” As she read aloud, we were both looking at the page. We knew we had to circle the correct choice from the underlined words. But I just put my head down.

“Daddy,” I said quietly, as I started feeling sad.

Brooke could tell that I was thinking about him. “I’m sorry, Morgan. It’s just a sentence,” Brooke said, patting my shoulder.

“I know, but it makes me think about how much I miss my dad.”

“Well, it’s okay to think about him. I’ll do the sentence. The answer is *heard*, which means to hear something. *Herd* means a group of animals.”

“Yeah, that sounds right to me. Next sentence: *I did not have any sodas four/for months. Four means the number and for means—*”

“It means that for is the right one,” Brooke said, as we laughed.

“Yep. Here’s another one: *Children should always try to make the write/right choices.*”

“*Write* means to write something down, but *right* is the correct answer because it means the opposite of wrong. Right?” Brooke said, smiling. We really were enjoying learning homophones together.

We kept on laughing as we finished the lesson and

rushed downstairs to show my mom our work. She was pleased with what we had done. Then Mom helped us bake some cookies. With our treats in hand, we headed to the basement for our girls' night of fun.

After a while, Brooke tiptoed over to the stairs and whispered softly, "All the lights are off up there. Your parents are probably asleep now, so we can watch the movie. She's not gonna come downstairs."

I didn't follow my own **instincts** and say no to my buddy. I just let my friend turn the channel to the scary movie. We sat close together as the weird music began. Knowing it was the wrong thing to do, I could feel trouble coming.

Not long after the movie started and the actors' names came across the TV screen, the light in the room came on too. That scared us so bad that Brooke almost jumped into my lap. Was it the bad man from the movie coming to get us? No! It was worse.

Mom yelled out, "I know that's not the movie I told you not to watch! Morgan, turn that TV off! You girls go upstairs and get in the bed right now! I said move!"

I looked at my friend. Brooke looked at me. I hung my head low and clicked off the TV. Walking upstairs, I knew I was in trouble with my mom for sure. And it was bad.



"Morgan, I'm sorry," Brooke said, as we were lying in my bed.

I didn't even say anything to her.

Later that night, we were both tossing and turning. It was a mess. Neither one of us could sleep.

When I couldn't take it any longer, I sat up in the bed and said, "I thought she was asleep. But I knew it was wrong for me watch that anyway. And I knew I would get in trouble for it, but I went along with you."

"You could have told me to turn it off, Morgan. Don't get mad at me!"

"I'm not mad at you, Brooke," I said, knowing that my friend was right. But I really did do it because I wanted to please her, not because I wanted to watch the movie. Though I didn't have to go along with it, she didn't have to throw it in my face either.

"We're both in trouble. Okay?" said Brooke. "I feel so bad. I wanna go to your mom right now and tell her I'm sorry." Then she thought about it some more and added, "But in the morning when she's calmed down. Anyway, I'm in double trouble."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"My mom doesn't let me watch those movies either."

"Then why did you tell my mom that she did?"

"Because I never asked my mom if I could and she doesn't even know I watch them. I guess she lets me because she never comes to check and see what I'm lookin' at in the middle of the night."

"Maybe after my mom talks to her, she'll start."

We both lay back in the bed and closed our eyes. When

we opened them again it was morning. All we could hear was the sound of my mom's loud voice.

"Girls, get up! Now!"

I looked over at the clock and it was only 7 a.m. It wasn't even a school day, and I wanted to argue. But, for sure, we didn't need to make it worse since we were already in trouble.

"Uh-oh, she sounds really mad. We'd better hurry up," Brooke said.

Getting out of the bed, I prayed, *Lord, I don't even deserve to pray to You because I was wrong. But can You make Mom not so mad, please?*

"Morgan, what's taking you so long? Come on!"

Mom had us follow her down to the laundry room. There were piles of freshly washed clothes waiting for us. "Okay, get to sorting. Brooke, you'll fold towels and pillow cases. Morgan, you can handle your jeans and shirts. Now get to work."

She didn't say anything more, but she didn't leave us in the room by ourselves either. My mom just quietly watched us. And her silence was worse than any words.

Finally, I turned around to her and said, "Mom, I'm sorry."

"Sorry for what, Morgan? Sorry that you got caught doing something I told you not to? Sorry that you didn't get to see the movie? What are you sorry for?"

"No, ma'am, I'm sorry that we **disobeyed** you in the first place."

"You're not sorry about that."

“Yes, I am.”

“If I hadn’t come downstairs, you would have kept watching the movie, right?”

“But even the music had me a little jumpy,” I added.

“That’s one of my points, Morgan. You think you’re a big girl and I can see that you’re growing up. But if you’re not careful, you’re going to do more harm than good. If you keep acting like you know better than me, you’ll miss out on some good times. I promise you.”

“What does that mean, Mom?”

“Girl. I’m so mad at you,” she said, **gritting** her teeth. “And Brooke—”

“Yes, ma’am?” Brooke said.

“I want Morgan to have friends who can help her do the right thing. Not ones who talk her into doing something wrong. I know last night you were a part of the reason for her doing the wrong thing. And I have a problem with that. I’m not sure if you’re the type of friend Morgan needs to be around because together the two of you are creating some bad habits.”

I went over to my mom and threw my arms around her. “No, Mom, we’re good for each other.”

“Well, if you’re good for each other, then why are you doing things that are so wrong?”

“It’s my fault,” Brooke said. “I didn’t tell you the truth. I told you that my mom let me watch those movies, but she doesn’t even know I watch them. I figured since you were asleep, you wouldn’t—”

Right Thing

“Come and check on you,” Mom said, finishing my friend’s sentence.

“Right. Yes, ma’am.”

“But, Brooke, that’s no way to be, sweetheart. Even when adults don’t catch you doing the wrong thing, God is always there watching you.”

“I didn’t even think about that,” Brooke said, as her eyes started to tear. Mine were beginning to do the same.

“Exactly. You have to think about the consequences to your actions. Would God want you doing something wrong? There’s a reason why those movies are rated the way they are. Neither one of you girls is thirteen. Without you even knowing it, whatever you’re watching on TV gets into your spirit. Then when you’re not even watching TV, you can get tense and nervous about things. And I want to help you avoid times like that. Instead, I want you to deposit positive memories in your life.”

“You’re gonna talk to my mom, aren’t you?” Brooke said with her head down.

My mom lifted her chin and said, “No, sweetie, you are. You’re a big girl. And because you’re a big girl, I expect you to tell her what’s going on. I want her to call me and let me know that you did the right thing. But if I don’t get a phone call soon after you go home, then I’ll tell her. It’s not because I want you to get in trouble for this. It’s because I don’t want you to get in trouble for something worse than this. We need to be able to trust you young ladies. You all should hold each other **accountable**.”

“Accountable?” I said, unsure of what that meant.

Mom said, “It means that you help each other do what’s right so you’ll never, ever do what’s wrong. It’s not good for you to break the rules, because God is not pleased with that kind of behavior. Do you understand?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Now, finish folding these clothes. Then come on up and get some breakfast. I love you both, okay?”

“Yes, ma’am,” we said again.

When Mom went upstairs, Brooke said, “I’m sorry, Morgan. I shouldn’t have pushed you into doing something that was wrong. I really do care about you.”

“It’s okay. I’m sorry I didn’t stand up to you and tell you that there’s no way I was gonna disobey what my mom said. But at least we’re learning right from wrong.”

“Yeah. We’ve got to do better.”



“Oh, so you got caught watching some bad movies?” Papa said to me. Jayden and I were staying the night since my parents were celebrating their two-year anniversary. I didn’t like it when Mom told her parents on me, but I was wrong and I would have to own up to it sometime.

“Get off of her back,” Mama said to Papa. “Morgan, now you know that was something you weren’t supposed to do, right?”

“Yes, ma’am. I know when Mommy tells me not to do something that I shouldn’t do it, Mama.”

“Speaking of the TV, go and turn that thing off. Don’t you hear all that lightning and thunder outside, young lady?”

I did hear a little bit of thunder, but I didn’t think it was that bad. That was one thing I didn’t like about coming over to my grandparents’ house. You had to sit still and be quiet when it was storming outside. You couldn’t even move. I didn’t like that because it made me focus more on the storm than anything else. At least when I was watching TV, I wasn’t worried about the loud crackling of the lightning bolts.

The next day I went to church with Mama and Papa. During service, we prayed for Miss May’s niece because her son, Billy Wood, got struck by lightning. My face looked very serious and I felt my insides quaking.

“Billy Wood from my class?” I asked Papa, whispering loudly.

Papa shushed me and asked, “You know him?”

“Yes, Billy is my friend. He was in my class.”

Then I started praying. *Lord, please let Billy be okay.*

Right after church, Papa asked me if I wanted to go to the hospital and see Billy. I remembered the hospital from a year ago when I had to go and visit my mom. She and baby Jayden weren’t doing too well. Pretty soon they were okay and didn’t have to stay too long. Since I was over it now, I told Papa we could go.

When we got to the hospital, Mama and Papa were talking to Billy’s mom and his aunt. I found out that if you

weren't the mom, dad, grandparents, or another close relative, you had to have a special pass to go into a patient's room. So I went and sat in the waiting room. There was a girl sitting next to the remote control. The TV was off but I wanted to turn it on and watch something.

"Excuse me, can I have the remote control?"

"No," she said, sounding angry.

I could tell she was a little older than me. I didn't know why she was being so mean. I had never done anything to her and didn't even know her. So I tried again.

"Can I please get the remote control?"

She stood up from her seat, walked over, and looked in my face. The remote control was still in the seat. She pushed me just a little and said, "I told you no the first time."

"You don't own the TVs in this hospital."

Before she could say anything back, Mama walked up and said, "Morgan, come on, sweetheart. They're going to let you see your friend."

"Okay."

"Why do you have that look on your face?" Mama asked.

I couldn't even give Mama an answer. But out of the corner of my eye, I could see the mean girl looking at me like, *HA, HA, HA! You didn't get the remote!* She even stuck her tongue out at me. I just shook it off. It wasn't that important to me and I didn't want to go into Billy's room upset about anything.

“They said you can go in for a little bit. He’s awake and he just finished his lunch. He’s going to be okay, honey.”

I pushed open the door to see Billy sitting up with the TV on.

“Billy!”

“Hey, Morgan, you came to see me?”

“Yeah, and the whole church is praying for you. What happened?”

“I was in the garage and I was supposed to be sitting down. All I remember was I didn’t want my bicycle to get wet. The next thing I knew, I woke up here. They said it could have been worse. But I’m cool.”

“Oh, Billy. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“I love it! It’s making my sister crazy mad that I’m getting all this **attention**.”

“Your sister?”

“Yeah. My mom said she’s in the waiting area. She’s tall and always has a mean look on her face. Her name is Bridget.”

“Yeah, I met her,” I said, looking sad and mad all mixed up together like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

“Don’t worry about her. She’s not so tough. I did learn one thing, though. When your parents tell you to do something, just do it. Or, you could end up getting struck by lightning, or worse. Even though it knocked me out and I ended up in the hospital, I wasn’t hurt too bad. So in the end, my nightmare turned out to have some good.”

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

I learned some things that I can share with all kids. I recommend they do what their parents say. I learned that some words sound the same but are spelled different and have different meanings. And if you don't get the word right, you'll mess up a sentence. For example, plane and plain are homophones. I hope you get on a PLANE soon and come see me. My instincts tell me you'll be here before I know it.

Dad, I disobeyed Mom. I know it was wrong. Mom was gritting her teeth to hold in her anger. I know now that I must be accountable for my bad actions. She got my attention and I won't let her, you, Daddy Derek, Mama, Papa, or God down again.

Your daughter,
Learning Morgan

Word Search

H A T T E N T I V R B A
D I S O B E Y E D E A C
J B L E W A S E E C K I
G B L U E T E K C O E N
D R V R Y T A O X M I S
I Z I L E E U W W M N T
S F F T R N O E E E S I
O L L D T T J A E N T N
B E U A F I G K K D I C
Y W B A C O N J O H N T
D L P H O N E G A M C S
E H O M O P H O N E S L

ACCOUNTABLE

ATTENTION

DISOBEYED

GRITTING

HOMOPHONES

INSTINCTS

RECOMMEND

Words to Know and Learn

1) **rec·om·mend** (rĕk'ə-mĕnd') *verb*

To present as worth doing; suggest; advise.

2) **hom·o·phone** (hŏm'ə-fŏn', hŏ'mə-) *noun*

A word that is pronounced the same as another but has a different meaning and often a different spelling, such as night, knight, blue, blew.

3) **in·stinct** (in'stĭngkt') *noun*

A strong natural tendency or ability.

4) **dis·o·bey** (dĭs'ə-bā') *verb* **dis·o·beyed** (past tense)

To refuse or fail to follow an order or rule.

5) **grit·ting** (grĭt) *verb*

Clamping (the teeth) together.

6) **ac·count·a·ble** (ə-koun'tə-bəl) *adjective*

To be held responsible for one's actions.

7) **at·ten·tion** (ə-tĕn'shən) *noun*

Concentration of the mind on something.

Stephanie Perry Moore

NO FEAR!

Morgan Love Series

Book 5

MOODY PUBLISHERS

CHICAGO

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Chapter 1

Serious Stuff

“Okay, everybody, it’s time to have a party!” Billy stood in front of the class and yelled. He had watched Mrs. Hardy after she stepped out of the room. By now she was already at the other end of the hallway.

Mrs. Hardy was headed to the principal’s office. You didn’t have to tell my classmates twice that it was time to have a bit of fun. They went up to our teacher’s desk and turned on the radio. Sometimes she let us listen to it after our work, but it was never set to the station they had on. And it was never so loud either. I had a bad feeling that we were going to get in major trouble because of all this.

Brooke jumped up and reached her hand out to me. “Come on, Morgan. Let’s dance!”

I wasn’t trying to be a party pooper. I just knew we were supposed to be reviewing the last couple of weeks

before Christmas break. The big standard test was coming in the spring.

Yeah, Mrs. Hardy got called away to the office, which is on the other side of the floor. But who could say that we wouldn't get caught? She was known for sneaking up and catching people doing stuff they weren't supposed to be doing.

Brooke and I had just talked about being each other's friend. We had such an on-again, off-again friendship. This time we promised we were going to help each other do the right things. So I gave Brooke a look like, *No, Brooke. Don't dance around the room and get in trouble like everybody else.*

But Brooke was already up, and I could see it in her eyes that she was ready to have some fun. Even so, I wasn't going to fall for that this time. I just sat there, looking at her with my hands on my hips.

Finally, I grabbed my best friend by her long ponytail and said, "We are not doing this, okay?" To my surprise, she didn't even argue with me and just sat down.

After a few minutes of watching the other kids, Brooke was becoming upset. "See that, Morgan? We could've been havin' fun too. Mrs. Hardy isn't even back yet."

Alec heard what she said and called out to us, "Yeah, but the ones she catches are gonna be in trouble!"

"Come on, Alec, man. Have a little fun," Trey said, as he bobbed up and down like a jumping jack toy.

Alec didn't back down. "We're gonna have fun. When-

ever she gets back, it'll be time for recess. But the way you all are actin', you'll make sure we won't have any more free time this year."

"What are you doing? Are you about to tell on us?" Trey asked Alec, as Alec gently opened the classroom door and peeked out.

"No, I'm watchin' out for Mrs. Hardy since nobody's thinkin' about that," Alec said, sounding like the grown-up one.

"Good lookin' out, Alec! Party over here," Billy sang out, waving his hand around in the air.

I was really happy that Billy wasn't sad like he'd been acting lately. He and his sister and his mom had been living with his mom's aunt, Miss May. She was my grandmother's best friend and neighbor. Of course, since I wasn't an adult, they didn't tell me everything that was going on. But I think Billy's sister had been acting out because she was tired of moving around. My mom told me that some people just don't handle changes very well.

I know for myself that moving around a lot is a big deal. I remember when my parents got divorced and I had to move with my mom to a place I didn't know anything about. Once she got remarried, I moved back in with my dad. But then he got assigned to a naval ship off the coast of Africa to serve our country. When my dad left, I was so sad. At that time I had to go to a new school and move in with my mom, my new baby brother, Jayden, and Daddy Derek.

Since then, we haven't moved around anymore. I actually enjoy living with my new family. So everything turned out to be good after all. I was hoping the same would happen for Billy's family. But for now, I was just happy to see Billy smiling.

"Here she comes! Here she comes!" Alec yelled out and ran back to his seat.

Trey didn't listen. He kept the music going and half of the class didn't even sit down. None of them knew how close she was, and they didn't listen to what Alec said. They just kept doing the wrong thing.

"What in the world?" Mrs. Hardy said, as she walked in and **flicked** the lights on and off. "Who turned on that music?"

Suddenly, the class was silent. I sunk down in my seat because I didn't want her to call on me. If she did, I was going to have to tell and I didn't want to. I planned to keep still and to keep my mouth shut.

"You know what? I don't even want the answer. All of you students need to understand that this is not a time for play. I know Christmas is coming and you all are excited, but we have some important work to do. So, everybody settle down and let's get started."

I was so glad that she wasn't going to punish the whole class this time. Mrs. Hardy was a very smart lady and she knew what she was doing.

"First of all," Mrs. Hardy said, "the name of the standard test is the CRCT. Can anyone tell me what CRCT stands for?"

No one answered. Then Alec raised his hand. “Mrs. Hardy, I think CRCT stands for Criterion-Referenced Compare Test. I asked my brother Antoine about it because he had to take when he was in the third grade.”

“The word is not compare, Alec. It is **competency**, but that was very close,” Mrs. Hardy said.

“That sounds so confusing. I see why they just call it the CRCT,” Brooke added.

Mrs. Hardy went on to tell us more about it. “The test is very important because it’s going to tell how much you know. It is organized by subject and the content is based on the standards given by the state. The main purpose is to let parents know if their child understands the material they are being taught. Furthermore, it’s important that you pass the CRCT in the spring so you can go on to the fourth grade. If you do not pass the reading and math, you will have to repeat the third grade and possibly be in my class again next year. Now, how many of you want that to happen?”

No one raised their hand. I don’t think any of us wanted to be in the same grade over again just because we weren’t ready to take that test. Our friends would pass us by while we’re still in Mrs. Hardy’s class, learning the same things and doing the same things all over again. For me, I was going to do my best not to let that happen.

“I know that all of you are more than able to pass the CRCT. However, the conduct that I saw just now from some of you makes me think you won’t like your test results.”

The more Mrs. Hardy kept talking, the more we started feeling smaller than ants. I hadn't even done anything but I was shaking. Just the thought of not passing that test and having to repeat a grade made my hands sweat and my heart beat faster. As Mrs. Hardy said, if we had to take the test today, I knew I wouldn't do well. At the moment, I was really afraid that I wouldn't pass the third grade.

Because of all this, I didn't think we should have recess. But Mrs. Hardy asked us why she should care to give us extra work since we didn't seem to care about passing the CRCT. I wanted to stay in my seat and ask her to teach us, please! But she made us line up to go outside and play. And off we went.

During recess, Trey came over to Brooke and me. "What's wrong with you, Morgan? Why are you lookin' at me like you're mad?"

"Mrs. Hardy said we need to make this time count for something and now she doesn't even wanna teach us because she thinks y'all were playin' too much."

Alec walked over bouncing a basketball. Trey said to him, "Alec, tell her we have plenty of time to get this. If we let ourselves worry too much, then we'll all be too scared to do a good job."

"Yeah, that's true. We can't take it too serious, but we do need to take it serious enough so we have the skills to pass," Alec replied. Then he took a shot at the net, making it with a *swoosh* sound.

"And what are you worried about anyway?" Trey asked

me. “You’re gonna do better than any of us.”

Alec started coughing. “I guess I see a contest comin’ on.”

“He’s probably gonna do way better than me. I’m scared.”

“You’re scared, Morgan? Then I should be scared.” I could tell Trey was starting to think about it all.

“What? You really don’t think we’re gonna pass?” asked Billy. “My sister said part of it was pretty hard . . . but we still have some time before we take it. Right?”

“Well, I’m just worried about repeating a grade, okay?” I said to my friends before walking off the playground. I was pretty much in tears.



“Derek, you’re going to have to tell the church that you can’t be there this time. You know that I have a house to show and you said you would be here this time when Morgan comes home. Can’t you reschedule?” my mom asked, looking unhappy.

“But, honey,” Daddy Derek said, “we agreed that my job takes **precedence**. Someone else in your office can show those clients around.”

Mom stopped chewing and let her fork hit the table. She was pretty upset, but Daddy Derek wasn’t about to give up. The two of them kept talking about it, with both of them giving their points of view. I don’t know if they had forgotten that I was sitting at the dinner table or not. I was

just feeling so lost. I heard what they were saying, but I didn't care and I wasn't really taking it all in anyway.

I had a standard test to get ready for. I needed to study for it because I could not fail. The whole idea was really scaring me. Because Mrs. Hardy kept telling us how important the results would be, nothing else was on my mind. Not even eating my favorite meal that was right before me. How could I not enjoy this large plate of spaghetti and juicy meatballs?

Today had just been hard. I didn't even want to play with my friends at recess. And, by no fault of my own, now I was listening to adults talk. I don't know why they were acting like I wasn't sitting right there.

"Can I be excused?" I finally said, after just playing around with my spaghetti.

Both of my parents looked at my plate and then looked at me. Mom said, "Morgan, you didn't even touch your food besides moving it from one side to the other. What's going on?"

"We're not angry with each other, if that's what you think, Morgan," said Daddy Derek.

I didn't want them to worry about me. They had their own problems. My mom had just started her new job. Although Daddy Derek thought he wanted her to work, it had been causing problems ever since. I certainly didn't want to throw my **anxiety** over the test in the mix.

"I just have some homework I need to look over. And I'm not that hungry."

“Morgan, please eat a little more, okay?” Mom requested.

Then Daddy Derek said, “Honey, why don’t you just call your parents and have them sit over here until Morgan gets home?”

“Because they have something to do tomorrow and you said you were going to be here. I really have a problem with that.”

“I can be here by myself,” I said, surprised that those words just came out of my mouth.

“That’s not a bad idea. At her age, she should be able to stay home by herself after school for a while. We should try it.”

Mom just shook her head. She wasn’t even trying to think about it. I guess I didn’t like the fact that my mom still looked at me like her baby.

I spoke up, “Mom, I can do it. I’ll be okay.”

“I’ll be home an hour and a half after she gets here. I just can’t be here right away,” Daddy Derek said. “If she’s willing to try it and nothing is wrong with it, I think we should let her.”

“Morgan, I have to tell you to eat all of your food. You’re not ready to be here by yourself yet. It’s not that I don’t think you’re a big girl, sweetheart. I just don’t think it’s time for you to be home alone right now.”

I stood up from my chair and yelled, “That’s so unfair!”

“Morgan, sit back down. You need to check your attitude, young lady.”

She didn’t have to tell me twice because I already knew

that having an A+ attitude was way better than having a rude one. It's just that sometimes when you don't get your way, it's hard to hold back your feelings.

"Mom, I'm sorry you think I have the wrong attitude, but I'm tryin' to grow up and you won't let me. I don't want anything else to eat, so can I please be excused? Please?"

"Go ahead, Morgan. I'll be there in a little while to talk to you."

Walking to my room, I prayed, *Lord, please help me keep my feelings in check. Mom and Daddy Derek are the parents and they know what's best for me. It's just that I get told no when I really wanna do something. Help me to understand that when I don't get my way it's okay. And help me not to be so afraid. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

I finished praying and put on my nightclothes for bed. Just then I watched my door slowly open and Mom creep in. I might as well be ready for the major letdown of not staying home by myself. So I was just waiting for her to tell me who my sitter was going to be for that time.

"Morgan, may I have a hug?" she whispered.

I had no problem giving her one. I had just prayed and asked God to help me not to be angry with her.

"You're growing up on me, sweetheart. I'll call as soon as you get off the bus. And Derek said he'll be here not too long after you get home."

"Oh, my goodness, Mom! You mean you're gonna let me?"

“Now, I need you to understand that this is a big deal, Morgan. I want you to lock the doors behind you right away. And you need to turn on the alarm as soon as you get in. The only thing I want you to make is a peanut butter and jelly sandwich because I don’t want you cooking anything.”

“I know, Mom. I know.”

“Okay, then the answer is yes.”

“Thank you, Mom!”

“Just don’t make me sorry about it, Morgan.”

“Yes, ma’am, I won’t,” I said in a serious tone, as I gave her a big kiss on the cheek.



“What’s up, Morgan? You’re night and day from the way you were yesterday,” Brooke said to me when I walked into the classroom with my head held high and a smile **plastered** on my face.

“That’s because I’m not a little kid anymore,” I said.

Billy jumped in, “Well, the last time I checked, you were in third grade just like the rest of us.”

“See, it’s like this. Kids need someone to pick them up from the bus stop. Kids have to have someone with them when they get home from school. Some kids have to wait after school for their parents to pick them up, but big kids—like me—get to stay home alone,” I said with pride.

Trey started laughing. “What! You’re gonna stay home alone? Miss Chicken?”

“I won’t be home alone for a long time and I’m not even supposed to tell people that I’ll be home alone. But I’m growin’ up and I’m proud of it.”

Brooke walked up close and put her arm around me. “Are you sure you wanna stay home alone?”

“Yes, I’m sure. My mom trusts me and I don’t wanna let her down. I’m ready for this.”

Trey said, “Are you even old enough to stay by yourself?”

“You’re gonna be like Dorothy on the *Wizard of Oz*,” Billy added, “afraid of lions and tigers and bears.”

Then Trey sneaked up behind me and shouted, “Oh my!”

Even though I jumped when he did that, I said, “I watched the *Wiz*! I’m not gonna be scared.”

“Plus, you can call me if somethin’ happens,” said Alec.

“Oooh, you can call Alec,” Billy teased.

“I’m not gonna call anybody. You guys are supposed to be my friends. Believe I can do this. Okay? And stop tryin’ to scare me.”

“Well, you were our friend yesterday until you said we were all gonna fail the CRCT,” said Billy.

“I’m sorry about that.”

“I’m just sayin’, if you’re scared to take a little test, you’re certainly gonna be scared to be home by yourself. As soon as you hear a little noise, you’ll be jumpin’ around the house, tryin’ to hide somewhere. Don’t say I didn’t

warn you. Besides, I think you have to be in the fourth grade before you're allowed to stay by yourself," said Mr. Know-It-All Trey.

"Okay, class, sit down. It's time to start the day." Mrs. Hardy called us to attention. "Morgan, Alec, you two need to get your things and get on the Challenge bus. You have a morning session today."

After Alec and I got a seat on the bus, I asked him, "Do you think I'm too young to stay home by myself? You think I can do it, right?"

"Don't let anybody make you afraid. I like the strong Morgan who's cool about things and not easily **persuaded**. Stop sweatin' it. You're gonna find trouble if you keep lookin' for it."

Alec was right. I did have lots of doubts about everything. But the rest of the day went by too fast, and I wasn't ready to go home yet. And I was becoming more afraid of the lions and tigers and bears—even though I knew they weren't at my house. Billy and Trey had frightened me for sure.

Before I knew it, I was at my door, ready to go in. I reached into my book bag to pull out the key. As soon as I began to turn the knob, it started to thunder. No way did I wanna be outside, so I quickly pushed open the door and stepped inside. When I shut the door, the security alarm seemed to sound louder than it does when Mom or Daddy Derek come home. I rushed over to turn it off before the police came to see about me.

Everything seemed strange to me. The whole house looked extra dark. I knew it was because it was cloudy outside, but I was really scared! What if someone was waiting for me around the corner or down the hallway? Right away, I started thinking that someone would try and come in.

I should have felt safe, right? Wrong. The thunder I heard as I was coming in the door was just a warm-up because it got louder and louder. The rain was coming down hard and beating against the windows. I wanted to turn on the TV to drown out the noise, but I remember Mama telling me not to use the electricity when the weather was like this. I also thought about my friend Billy getting hit by lightning, so I was trying to play it cool.

The only thing I could do was sit in a ball and rock back and forth, praying,

“Okay, Lord, I’m scared. I need You to help me calm down. This wasn’t a good idea for me to be home alone after all. I don’t wanna be afraid, Lord.”

The phone rang and I jumped. What if it wasn’t Mom or Daddy Derek? What if it was someone I didn’t know who knew I was home by myself and they were coming to get me? I was making up all kinds of scary **scenarios**, and none of this was good for me. I ran into my parents’ room to get the phone and then the ringing stopped. As soon as it started back again, I quickly picked it up.

“Hello? Hello?”

I finally heard a welcome voice. “Morgan, are you okay, sweetheart?”

“Mama, please come and get me! I’m scared. It’s thundering and lightning.” The sky seemed like it was falling on the house! “I’m hearing all kinds of noises.”

“Calm down, girl. Papa and I are pulling onto your street right now. We’ll see you in just a minute.”

Before I knew it, my grandparents were standing at the front door. I turned off the alarm and flung the door open, wrapping my arms around both of them so tight.

“I told you we needed to be close by. I knew it wasn’t a good idea for her to be home by herself,” Mama said.

“Yeah, but it’s good we let her try. It’s all this lightning and storming that got her worried,” said Papa.

“I was so wrong. I shouldn’t have wanted to be home by myself,” I said, as I tried to calm down.

Papa took my hand and said, “I’m going to teach you Psalm 23. Say this with me, ‘The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters. He restores my soul; He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.’”

“Basically, it says we should have no fear,” Mama explained.

Something was going on with me and I was confused. I wanted to act older, but I was nervous about everything. Even so, I couldn't let my fears defeat me. Like Papa said, I had to remember the words to Psalm 23 because being afraid of everything just wasn't the right way to be. This was serious stuff.

Letter to Dad



Dear Dad,

It was a bad storm and the lights scared me when they flicked off and on. I was home alone because Mommy's job took precedence over her being home this afternoon. I thought I was old enough to be home alone, but I'm not ready yet. I'm a little nervous about a lot of stuff.

Dad, I've got major anxiety about the test we're gonna take soon. "Not wanting to take the competency test" is plastered all across my face. Mama and Papa persuaded me to trust God and have no fear. But I need you to pray for the standard tests I have to take soon because the scenarios I have of failing them are creepier than that spider that crawled on me when I was five.

Your daughter,
Scared Morgan

Word Search

I N D I A N A S E N O J
M X C Q S R I T X A D C
P P R E C E D E N C E A
O E B Z E Y W P H O R L
R R G S N S A H W M E I
T S J H A P L E M P T F
A U S A R A K N G E S O
N A F L I C K E D T A R
T D U T O E L N V E L N
M E R U S N O R E N P I
T D R H A R D Y P C O A
K E Y T E I X N A Y F D

ANXIETY

COMPETENCY

FLICKED

PERSUADED

PLASTERED

PRECEDENCE

SCENARIOS

Words to Know and Learn

1) **flick** (flɪk) *verb*

To burn or shine unsteadily, such as a light.

2) **com·pe·ten·cy** (kɒm'pɪ-tən-sē) *noun*

Ability.

3) **prec·e·dence** ('pre-sə-dənts) *noun*

Priority.

4) **anx·i·e·ty** (æŋg-zɪ'i-tē) *noun*

A state of uneasiness.

5) **plas·ter** (plɑs'tər) *verb* **plas·tered** (past tense)

To smear a surface with a coating of some kind.

6) **per·suade** (pər-swād') *verb* **per·suad·ed** (past tense)

To cause to believe something.

7) **sce·nar·i·o** (sɪ-nâr'ē-ō', -nâr'-, -nâr'-) *noun* **sce·nar·i·os**
(plural)

A made-up idea of what could happen.