

Dear Diary:

Sue Mordoh

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I just had to write you about Johnnie Paul Cooper. When we was at school this morning, he came running up to me yelling, "I know a secret. I know a secret."

Of course, I didn't believe him but I asked anyway, "What's your old secret?"

"I'm not telling you," he laughed and started running around in circles.

"That's 'cause you don't have no secret," I told him, knowing all along he didn't.

"Yes, I do. Yes, I do. I know something about Miss Richards that you don't."

"You don't know nothing about Miss Richards, so stop making things up."

"Yes, I do. And I know 'cause I seen her. I seen her with my own eyes this very morning right out there in her car in the parking lot. I seen her."

"It's 'saw', not 'seen', you old dummy. And you'd better stop it or I'm telling." That dumb old Johnnie Paul is always making things up. I

tell you he's enough to wear a person's mind completely down. You never can believe a word he says. He's as crazy as a squirrel with its tail on fire.

Just then he stops running and acts like he's sneaking up on something to grab it, and I don't move because I'm already sitting on the bus bench with my books piled up and my lunch box on top; and when he gets real close, he stops and turns his head from one side to the other and rolls his eyes around and around until they bug way out of his head, and he whispers, "Miss Richards wears a wig."

"You crazy boob!" I yelled at him and chased him all the way over to the flag pole. "You quit saying that. She don't wear no wig. If you don't shut up, I'm telling."

"Tell if you want to, but I seen her this morning right in her car looking in that little mirror. She gave it a yank, and the whole thing turned right around on her head. Then she lifted up one corner by her ear and shoved some light-colored hair under it, then she lifted up the corner by her other ear and poked hair under it, too. I tell you I seen her with my own eyes. I was poking holes in the old stump waiting for Dicky Taylor, and she was parked right beside me."

"Well, I don't believe no such thing," I told him.

Miss Richards, and everybody knows it, is the most beautiful woman in town. She wears those soft silky blouses with little shiny, raised places on them, and she smells like Heaven itself. When I grow up I'm going to wear perfume just like her. You can tell she's been in a room even if she isn't there anymore. And I love the way she puts her lipstick on, when she puckers up her mouth and then gives that little smack right when she's finished. I tried it in the bathroom once when nobody was home, but I couldn't get the smack quite right. All I could make was a sort of pop sound.

Nobody ever had a nicer teacher in the whole world. She lets me sit right up front by her desk so I can pass out the spelling papers, and every Tuesday she sends me down to Miss Riggs' room to get the book for story hour. Old Johnnie Paul got to clean the erasers Friday and really thought he was hot stuff. The very idea, him saying that awful thing about her! I just know she don't wear no wig.

Mama says wigs are for *those* women who dye their hair until it frizzes right out of their head. Miss Richards *couldn't* be one of those women Mrs. Evans whispers to Mama about. I'm not supposed to hear, but if I pull the vent down on the heat register in my room, every sound in the kitchen comes up plain as day. I always go up there and pretend

to read when Mrs. Evans comes over. She knows everything—even what everybody in town had for breakfast, Daddy says. She talks and talks. Mama says it's real bad to gossip so she don't say nothing, but just listens and listens. I listen, too, 'cause I figure it don't hurt to know what's going on. Daddy says that one of the true blessings of life is someone who minds his own business, so that's what I told Johnnie Paul. And then I said, "Besides, you'd better be able to prove what you say 'cause if you're making up awful tales, it's a sin and disgrace against the Lord.

"I ain't making up tales—anyway, I bet I can prove it."

"Bet you can't, you old chicken. Anyway, how're you going to do it—yank it off with a fishing line?"

"Don't call me no 'chicken'. I bet I can yank that thing right off her head. When she takes the Bluebirds to do their reading on the chairs in the back, I can just sneak right up behind her with a fishing pole," he said and started sneaking and rolling his eyes again.

"You don't have no fishing pole, you old chicken. Besides, you'd be scared as a snake in church."

"I ain't scared, and I ain't chicken. You just wait and see."

About that time the bell rang and everybody had to hurry inside, and that dumb old Johnnie Paul kept shoving me and saying, "Wait and see. Wait and see." I tell you he's crazy.

After the Pledge of Allegiance and Pricilla Jane Sanders leading us all in our morning devotions, we had to work on our geography; that is, everybody except the Bluebirds, and they went to the chairs in the back for their reading time. We were drawing our maps of the United States with Canada and Mexico attached. I had no sooner finished Mississippi and was starting that little stick-out place on Louisiana when the awfulest screaming there ever was came from the back of the room. It near scared me out of my wits. And before we could figure what had happened, old Johnnie Paul went running right across the front of the room waving a brown wig on the end of the map stick, and Miss Richards was hot on his trail. You never saw anything funnier in your whole life. We all started running around, and that was the end of the map drawing, you can bet. Mr. Wilson must have heard the commotion because it wasn't two minutes before he popped in the door, and old Johnnie Paul nearly bumped right into him still waving that old brown wig around. Boy, it sure got quiet fast. Everybody's scared to death of the principal. Then Miss Biggs came in and told Miss Richards not to worry, that she would finish the day for her.

I felt real bad. You could tell poor Miss Richards was about to cry, the way her chin was all puckered up. Then she said there would be crinations; and I sure was glad she was looking at Johnnie Paul because, if it was all the same to her, I'd just as soon he had them as me. After all, I had told him he should keep his nose where it belonged and out of other people's business. I suppose she can wear a wig if she wants to.

Goodnight.

I love you.

Maureen Elizabeth Stapleton

