

YOUNG ADULT EXCERPT- *TABOO* BY JOYCE DOYLE

*Summary: Bullying is bad, and Parker's Cove teens are ready to do something about it. Their Anti-Bullying Club is popular – so popular, if you're not a member you're an outcast. Five teens - the believer, the rebel, the disillusioned, the faker, and the follower - discover their own power to stand up.*

**\*Pages extracted from middle of story.\***

FRAN

The hallway of students dressed in blue and tan is just freaky. Fran tugs at her own shirt. She showed up late to the market last weekend and was faced with the choice between extra-large and boat-sail-large. It's practically a prairie dress. She's been wearing t-shirts underneath all week so when she bends over setting up her camera she doesn't give the entire male population of Parker's Cove a free show. Not that she has that much to show off. Plus, there's too much material to tuck in and she's already been written up for tying the tails into a knot to keep them from swinging around her hips. She sighs.

The whole week has been surreal. Monday morning rolled around and, while all the elementary grades dutifully wore their new uniforms, only about half of the upper grade students did. They must have thought it was a practical joke, that it wasn't going to be enforced. They were pulled aside as they walked up to the school and forced to stand outside even though the fog had rolled back in and it was raw feeling. Anyone in the uniform that tried to stop and talk to a non-uniformed student was sent inside right away. It was strange seeing Señorita Soprano as an

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enforcer, Fran had her Spanish class last year and remembers her as a total pushover who cares more about the students liking her than learning the language.

First bell rang and the students who were pulled aside were still standing, all lined up, outside the building. Traveling from class to class everyone looked out the windows to see what was happening. Nothing was happening, they were just standing there. All morning. Teachers took shifts monitoring them. At first the students in the school were told to stop staring out the window and focus on their classes, but eventually even the teachers gave up on the idea of holding a real class and joined everyone watching the non-uniformed students standing outside. Fran even filmed a little bit on her phone, but it doesn't make exciting footage to see students lined up standing still. Some wore backpacks but others were unfortunate enough to have carried their books loose, and they had to hold them in their arms the entire time.

They were marched inside at lunch and seated at two tables pulled into a back corner away from the rest. Then it was right back outside again until last bell when Principal Woods appeared for the first time that day and handed them all blue shirts. They were released.

The rest of the week everybody wore their uniforms. Several don't fit well, like Fran's, and almost everyone has to wash it each night since they only have the one set. It's strange enough to have to adjust to that, but it isn't even the only change at the school. Students aren't allowed to talk between classes, a time traditionally reserved for socializing, gossiping, and getting out some energy before sitting still for another fifty-minute period. Instead, they were supposed to walk, not run, to their lockers, collect the necessary books, and walk to their next

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classes - silently. The first day the silence wasn't enforced either because the teachers were distracted playing jailer outside and didn't have the manpower to monitor the halls, or because they wanted the students to talk about what was happening to the non-uniformed students. Either way, that first day they were allowed to behave normally, although nobody really did.

But now silence is enforced. No more shouts, slamming lockers, thumping feet. No more jostling shoulders. No more greeting friends. Fran walks through the hallway in a sea of blue, and all she hears are the soft shuffle of shoes on the tile flooring. When she passes Mac she smiles and waves, he nods back at her.

### COREY

Corey watches the hallway fill with students, a sea of shifting blue, swirling together and apart before eddying in a new location downstream, a tide relentless in its pull back into the classrooms. He likes the uniformity, the sameness they all have. He tugs on the sleeve of his own blue shirt which his mother pressed clear of wrinkles for him just this morning. He starts his unconscious routine. Tug the sleeves. Straighten the collar. Check the tuck. Center the belt buckle. Smooth the pant. Confirm the shoe laces are tied.

He finishes with a quick pat to his hair. He thinks his new cut is more in keeping with the uniform. Instead of wearing it nearly chin length, ignored most of the time despite it hanging limply in his face, he cropped it. He walked into the barber shop, which was really just a converted garage off the side of Dan Higgins' house, and announced he wanted it shaved. Dan's

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jaw dropped. Corey knew the old man had been wanting to cut his mop for years. Dan practically bounced to the chair, swung a cape over Corey's chest with a flourish worthy of a bull fighter and went to work. A quarter-inch around the sides and back, Dan called it a number two. Then he took the scissors to the top and front, leaving it slightly longer but still well above Corey's eyebrows. Corey feels a lot lighter now, breezier. Present. He runs his hand up the back of his head where the tiny bristles scratch his palm.

The halls are clearing out, just a few stragglers left delaying the inevitable. They move smoothly, quietly. Corey is one of the newly-assigned official hall monitors. He has a lot of experience watching the halls. He knows the patterns, who will try to ditch, who will cause a stir. Mr. Baker steps out into the hall and sees Corey standing at the end. Corey nods and Mr. Baker frowns but doesn't tell Corey to get to class before reentering his classroom and shutting the door behind him. Corey can't help smiling. It's okay, no one is around now to see.