

Sue goes to Kindergarten

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Sue goes to Kindergarten

by [Hunter \(AlessNox\)](#)

Summary

Sue starts school in a time of illness.

She doesn't understand why some people wear red bands, and some wear white.

A tale of a little girl in a future that may or may not come to pass.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Sue woke up when the sky was just beginning to lighten and ran into her parent's bedroom.

"It's today! It's today!" she said shaking her mother awake.

Her father turned to look at her. He smiled, his eyes groggy. *"It is today, little girl. Your first day of kindergarten. Are you excited?"*

"Yes!" Sue said jumping up and down before rushing back into her room. She pushed her stepstool into her closet and pulled down the blue dress. Mother hadn't let her wear it before, but today she could. Today she would!

Today, Sue would finally be able to play with other children.

Mother fixed her eggs and pancakes for breakfast. Father was sleeping in, as he'd had a conference late last night and was still tired. Mother scolded Sue for standing up while eating, but she couldn't sit still. It had been years since she had played with cousin Kevin before he and her uncle had moved away. She didn't even remember it, although she knew that it had happened. She'd seen pictures.

Her mother combed her hair, only this time she pushed her straight black tresses back and added

pale blue clips with bows to hold them away from her ears. Then they went into her room to get dressed. First she put on the frilly white underwear that grandma had sent along with three hand made quilts when she was just a baby. Then she pulled on thick white tights. They itched, but mama said she needed to wear them anyway. Then Sue raised her hands, and mother pulled the dress down over her head.

It was light blue with white curly lace on the edges, a big bow in the back and puffy sleeves like a princess. Sue put on her shiny new shoes and swirled around in a circle. The shoes were black leather with a strap across the top. She ran down the hall, her feet clicking loudly as her mother called after her, telling her not to wear shoes in the house.

They kept shoes under a bench in the little room by the door that Papa called the “A-trum”. Mama had her stand there while she pressed down with her thumb on her toes to see if the shoes fit.

“You’re growing so fast that these will be too small before long.”

Sue smiled, jumping up and down as mother put on her own coat.

“Stay still. We have to put your outside clothes on,” Mother said threading her hand through her white knit sweater.

“Mama, this is hot.”

“You don’t know how cold it will be in the school building, so keep it on.”

Mother helped her into white cotton gloves. Then she put larger plastic gloves over them before securing it with a strap. Then she hooked the mask over Sue’s ears and tightened it using small clip so that it wouldn’t fall off.

The last thing she did was place a wide white band over her left wrist. The same kind of band that mother and father wore whenever they left the house.

Before they left mother took her picture. Sue wished she had taken it before she put on her mask, because no one could see how wide she was smiling.

When they arrived at school, a woman was at the door. Mother held up her wrist, and the woman pointed to a second door further down. Mother drove ahead and a tall woman with gloves and a white band on her wrist opened the car door.

“Go ahead,” mother said to her.

Sue climbed out of the car and the woman closed the door behind her. She checked Sue’s name off on a list, and stuck a name tag on her chest before pointing her toward the open school door.

Sue walked down the pavement toward the door. She looked back and waved, but her mother had already gone ahead, and the woman was opening another car door.

Another woman inside the school, read her tag and told her to stand against the wall and wait until her teacher could come to pick her up. She was standing next to a boy with light brown hair. He was as short as she was. He wore a red shirt, a white mask, and blue jeans.

“Hello,” she said.

The boy looked at her, but said nothing.

“My name is Sue. What’s your name?”

“Morgan,” the boy said after looking around nervously.

Older children walked past them already knowing where to go. There were so many people! More than Sue had ever seen in one place. Everyone was running around, and everyone was so large, that Sue started to get a little scared. She stared down at her shoes, and her eyes started to tear up. Then she felt someone holding her gloved hand.

She looked up and Morgan’s eyes were smiling at her. *“It’s okay. My brother told me all about school. He would have come with me, but he had to go through the other door. He told me that kindergarten is fun!”*

Morgan squeezed her hand, and she squeezed his back. It didn’t feel so scary with someone beside her.

Then a nice woman in a yellow plaid suit bent down and looked them both in the eye. Her mask had daisies on it.

“Hello, Morgan and Sue. I’m Miss Alan, your teacher. I’m so happy to have you in my class this year. If you’ll please follow me, I will show you where to put your things.”

They walked down the hall looking around at all of the bright-colored posters on the walls. They could see other students sitting behind desks through the open classroom doors .

“This is our room,” Miss Alan said. *“Those cubbies are for your bags.”*

She pointed to a white box almost as tall as Sue that was standing up against the wall. Sue took off her backpack and hung it on the hook. Morgan hung his beside hers. Then she noticed that their names were written in big letters over the top of each cubby.

Then they followed Miss Alan into the center of the room and sat on a giant woven rug shaped like a circle. There were other kids already sitting there. She counted them. There were eight of them. They had been waiting for them to arrive.

Morgan was right. School was fun. They sang, and they counted, they colored, and the teacher read them stories. Before long, the day was already over, and Sue went back to her cubby to pick up her bag. She wanted to take the picture that she had drawn of her teacher home, but the teacher took a photo of it instead and said that she would email it to her Mother. Then she and Morgan went to the door and waited. Before long, her mother rolled up in the car and they drove away.

“How was your first day of school?”

“It was fun!” Sue said.

Mother took another picture of her when she climbed out of her car. Mother put the two pictures side by side and said. *“I think you’ve grown older already.”*

“Of course I’m older, Mama. That’s how it works.”

On the porch, Mama helped her take off her plastic gloves putting them in the outside trash. Then she opened the door and had her leave the shoes outside as she stepped into the house. Sue took off her sweater, her tights, her gloves, her dress, and her undies and Mother carried her to the bath that father had started running when they had left the school building.

She got to bathe and splash in the tub as long as she wanted. When she was ready to get out of the bath, her mother had already changed clothes. She ran through the house, and found that the front area had been cleaned and the washing machine was running.

By dinner time, a printout of her drawing was already pasted onto the front of the refrigerator.

The next morning she wanted to wear the pink jumpsuit, but mother didn’t let her.

“It’s too hard to put on and off. You need to keep clean. You are putting you gloves on correctly aren’t you?”

“Yes, Mama. There is a special clean bathroom, and Ms Alan said she’ll help if I ask.”

“I know that, but it means nothing if you aren’t following the rules.”

“I am, Mama, I am!”

“You’ll wear the green dress today. You can wear the jumpsuit when you get home.”

That day at school, Morgan started coughing during storytime. At first the teacher kept going, but when he didn’t stop, the teacher told us to wait while she walked him down to see the nurse. Later, as we walked toward the blacktop to play, our line stood against the wall to wait, and I could hear someone yelling in the principal’s office.

A woman with a white band on her wrist and a white mask was holding onto Morgan’s arm.

“You must have done something. He was fine before he came here.”

“You should have told us he had had a suspect contact before you brought him to school.”

“He was fine. His paperwork says he’s fine. It must have been someone here.”

“I’m sorry, but policy says that he must quarantine and be recertified before....”

But then the other class had passed by, and we continued walking to recess.

Morgan didn’t come back that day... or the next... or the next.

At night, when Sue was supposed to be sleeping, she heard her parents talking.

“Do you think he infected her? He was in the same class. They used the same bathroom!”

“I don’t think so. They all use the same protocol. But, I’ll pick up a kit on my way to the store.”

“We should homeschool her.”

“We talked about this. We are not keeping her in a box her whole life. With the new antivirals, the other students do not have a noticeable trace...”

“That’s what they say now. They’ve been wrong before. If our daughter gets this, where is she going to live? Her grandparents are gone.”

“There’s my sister.”

“I don’t want Sue to move to another state.”

“I think my office will let me move. I’m almost 100% telecommute as it is.”

“We have a good life here. After everything we’ve been through. I don’t want to move!”

“We won’t have to dear. I’m sure Sue is fine. She’s a smart girl. She knows how to follow the rules.”

“Is her door still open?”

Sue heard footsteps in the hall, then the door shut, and she couldn’t hear anything else.

Without Morgan at school, Sue was always alone. She had her white cubby on one side of the door, while the others used the brightly colored cubbies on the other side. After school, the students all ran out of the big double doors on the main hall, while she walked over to the side door to wait for her mother. She missed Morgan a lot these days.

One day, when Sue was reading, Maggie came over. Maggie had yellow hair with a streak of red. She wore it in two braids on either side of her face. She wore a paper mask where everyone else wore cloth. It hung low, almost falling off of her nose.

“Hey, Sue.”

“Hey, Maggie.”

“You wanna play jump rope with us today at recess?”

Sue nodded.

“Good, see ya then, okay?”

Sue had watched the girls laughing and playing jump rope together while she had played hopscotch

by herself. The boys played tag. She had wanted to play with them, but she had been too shy to ask.

She was a bit nervous as they filed out into the yard, but Maggie took her arm and pulled her over to the box where the ropes and hoops were kept. Two of the girls swung the rope, and Maggie jumped. Then they swung the rope for her, and after tripping once, she got the hang of it and jumped twelve times before it caught her. They all took turns swinging and jumping. On her second turn, Maggie jumped in with her. She turned to face her and they jumped the rope together. It was fun! Later, she colored a picture of her and Maggie jumping rope together. The teacher took a photo, and it was on the refrigerator by the time she got home.

That week the girls played with her every day, and Maggie sat beside her at reading time. Mother asked her every day as she took off her clothes in the “Atrium” if she had washed her hands and put on her gloves like she had been taught. She nodded. Everything was very good.

Then one day, Morgan came back to school.

Sue ran over to him in the hall and tried to take his hand, but he stepped away from her.

“My Brother said not to,” Morgan said. *“He told me that girls have cooties.”*

Then he turned and ran into the room ahead of her. It was then that she noticed that Morgan’s name had been taken off of his white cubby. He had a new yellow cubby on the other side of the room, and he wore a red band on his wrist like all of the other kids in the class. Sue asked to go to the bathroom. She took off her gloves and washed her hands and face. She washed them twice so that no one would notice that she had been crying.

At recess, Sue didn’t feel like playing. Morgan was playing tag with the boys. He was smiling and jumping. He looked happier than he had when they had played hopscotch together. She sat on the bench next to the tree, alone.

After a while, Maggie came over and sat beside her.

“Why didn’t you come to jump rope with us, Sue?”

“I don’t feel like jumping rope today.”

“You think you’re better than the rest of us, don’t you?”

Sue looked up at Maggie. *“What?”*

“Using the ‘clean’ bathroom and walking around with a white band on your wrist. It makes you better than the rest of us. That’s what you think, right?”

“What? No. I never said that.”

“Then prove it.”

Maggie pulled the mask off of one of her ears and pulled off her knit gloves. Then she spit into her hand and held it out.

“If you don’t think you’re better than me, then shake my hand.”

Sue didn’t want to, but she reached out toward Maggie.

“Not with your gloves on. Shake with your bare hand or it doesn’t count.”

Sue stared at the hand. It was wet, and icky. She remembered Morgan saying that girls had cooties. She reached for her wrist. She felt the white band there. She started to pull at the base of her glove, then she stopped.

She looked at Maggie’s hand. Then she pulled on the glove, but the strap held it on. Before she could take the glove all of the way off, a teacher yelled from across the yard.

“Maggie Nelson, put that mask on this minute!”

Maggie jumped to her feet and wiped her hand on her hip. She smirked back at Sue, before placing the loop of the mask around her ear. Then she ran off to talk to the other girls. They laughed.

Nobody sat beside Sue at storytime.

When mother came to pick her up, she was crying again. *“I don’t want to go to school anymore,”* Sue said. *“I want to be home schooled.”*

Mother asked her what was wrong, but Sue wouldn’t say, she couldn’t say it. She heard her parents arguing while she sat in the tub.

“I called the teacher, but she didn’t notice anything except...apparently Morgan is back at school again.”

“Thank goodness he didn’t infect her. I heard that his father and mother are having a custody battle. Rumor is that his father took him out mask-less because he wanted all of his sons to live with him.”

“That’s horrible. What should we do about Sue?”

“Nothing. By the end of the week, she will have forgotten all about this.”

“I’m done!” Sue yelled while standing up in the bath. She didn’t want them talking about her anymore.

That evening as mother was cleaning the ‘A trum’ and Father was in his office at work, Sue went to go get some milk and saw the picture of her and Maggie on the refrigerator. She pulled it off and

tore it into little pieces before throwing it into the trash.

She didn't need Maggie or Morgan. Sue was smart, and she knew how to follow the rules. And she would follow them, even if no one ever played with her again.

End Notes

I have added this story to the Journal of the Plague Year collection, which collects fics written during the coronavirus pandemic that include commentary about how the crisis affected the fic/writer.

I was listening to a podcast where they compared SARS2 to AIDS suggesting there will be no vaccine because it affects the immune system, and I was getting scared because I knew that we can't Shelter In Place forever.

Then I wondered what it would be like if most people in the world had Covid-19, but some never got it. How could we live in that world? So I imagined a girl entering school for the first time. For her, this is just what the world is like. She wouldn't see this world as worse like adults might.

I wanted to see the challenges she would have to go through. The joys she would have. The world through her eyes.

I wanted to remember that no matter what, we would go on.

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