

SHELLY ABDOOL

postcards of a woman learning

grade eight

mr. bogman liked to tease girls. wasn't embarrassed to touch them either. he taught gym class, picked little black hot pants as female uniforms.

lisa and i were badminton partners. we were also gungas, a club michelle created for 8 of us to be forever friends. we were waiting for a court and mr. bogman was talking to us in grating voice. maybe he thought it was sexy. he said we were too self-involved to include anyone else in our club. i roll my eyes at lisa. he pretends not to like us. but we see him watch us as we run track and field, do open-leg stretches on the lawn.

lisa drops the birdie she was bouncing off her racquet. i bend over to pick it up and mr. bogman swats my behind. bolting up i say

don't touch my bum.

waxing apologetic, he walks away.

we smile at each other. high fives and pinky swears of friendship.
i learned where to find my voice.
and it came from within.

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it's ten o'clock and i'm in mr. scale's office. he's my high school guidance counsellor. we're choosing my courses. i want to take world issues and study politics.

he suggests home economics. says i will learn to keep a house according to a budget, to care for children and to cook. says i will like the teacher. she really knows her stuff.

i tell him i already have a teacher for that. my mother. i have been cooking since the age of thirteen and i know how to do it. my mom also knows her stuff.

*i can clean a house. a course on how to do things i do everyday is a waste of my time.
i will take world issues and study politics instead.
that will be more worthwhile.*

he shrugs. looks away. says it's up to me.

i walk out of his office, head high.

i have learned what it is like to be heard.
damn right it's up to me.

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all women are flaming cunts of glory,

armaand writes. defends it by referring to my story on breast cancer. i don't see the connection.

later, he yells and screams and tells me i'm a feminist. he doesn't like my writing and all immigrants are useless drains on society. my grandfather shouldn't have died in a hospital if he didn't pay taxes.

my stomach turns and class is dismissed. livia comes to give me a hug but i don't know what to say. she will call me.

we decide to report armaand's comments as unacademic. inappropriate to the classroom. he is not happy. booming voice over me asks,

why didn't you tell me you were offended? i am not racist.

for weeks livia and i lost security. parking lots loomed scary. skulking shadows filled ttc subways. armaand's credit is in jeopardy. this is what t.s. wants to talk about.

livia loses her office.
armaand gets an A.

i have learned who has power
and it is not me.

Excerpted from a longer version.

Shelly Abdool graduated in the spring of 1996 from York University with a BA in French and Political Science.