

Name Recognition

By
Lad Moore



When even the very strongest among us could be reduced to mere whimpering rubble.

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In the decades up to and ending a few years after the Cuban Missile Crisis period, there was one word that could strike fear in the hearts of all Marshall High School students. No, it wasn't the frightful "Duck and Cover!" order that sent us scurrying beneath our desks with hands covering our heads, or lining up on haunches facing the hallway walls in nuclear or tornadic weather drills. It wasn't "Finals," although that word could cause one's face to burn as if bathed in hot candle wax—knowing that a poor test performance could possibly forestall graduation. The word I am reaching for was even more

devastating and fearsome than a “Poor Conduct” remark on one’s report card—a critique that would result in not only punishment at school, but punishment again at home.

“Grounded” may have been a deeply dreaded word, but no, the loss of one’s freedom was tame in comparison. The *News Messenger* headline, “Lobos 55, Mavs 6” could sour the belly, but no mere sporting outcome could compare to this most severe sinking feeling. While the words “Breaking Up” could dash even the strongest of a lover’s psyche, they were fleeting in effect, and could eventually be wept away. The word I am groping for, the one that turned athletic heroes to dust and reduced giddy girls to sniveling streams of tears was far more devastating than anything else I can recall.

That word was...do you remember it? Can you still feel the hackles rise on the back of your neck? Do your knees quiver and legs buckle at just the sound? To this day do your eyes begin to gloss over, weep, and burn? Is just the very recollection still a major cause of headaches, nightmares, and severe bouts of diarrhea? Can you still feel the sharp barbs of pain when the six harmless letters are finally strung together to form that horrific word?

Grab something sturdy, because even after all these years, your sanity will abandon you. You will tremble to the core and your nerve endings will be rendered raw and bare.

I am sorry to do this to you...the word is...

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Selma Brotze". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and a long horizontal line extending from the top of the 'z'.

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Authentic Selma Brotze Signature Courtesy of David Murphy, Tyler TX

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The author's latest short story collection, "Riders of the Seven Hills" is now available at traditional booksellers along with his previous works, "Tailwind" and "Odie Dodie."  
Signed copies may be obtained by contacting the author.