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(Written and submitted without aid of a teacher)

Expectations

Susan Turner sighed as she surveyed the sagging shelves and tattered books housed in the Montgomery Public Library's colored branch. As long as Susan could remember, the colored library never had any new books. They'd always been passed down from the other library. The white folks' library. And the bookcases didn't match. The building was mighty dark for reading. The chairs were hard and rickety. Susan grimaced. It didn't matter. No one ever came to the library anyways.

Susan Turner, known as Miss Turner, was the librarian at the colored library. Folks called her crazy for taking the job. It didn't pay well (though she was the sole employee), and it was lonely sitting behind a desk all day, surrounded by dilapidated books. But Susan fiercely maintained, no-one else would have taken the job, and the branch would have been closed down for good.

Good riddance, folks muttered. The library never had the books you needed, and loans from the whites' library took weeks to be processed. When you finally got the book, you didn't even need it anymore. But that was the way of things in 1920s Alabama...

Miss Turner was dozing when she was startled by a sudden noise. She looked up and saw a small girl enter. Miss Turner smiled warmly.

The girl seemed very nervous. "H-hello, ma'am. I'm Rosa. Rosa Parks. I-I'm looking for a book – *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens."

"Oh," Miss Turner frowned, "We don't have that." Rosa's face fell and Miss Turner rushed to say, "But check back next week, I'm expecting a box of books from the other branch." Rosa grinned happily.

No one else came to the library that week, but Rosa arrived as promised. "Let's open it together," Miss Turner suggested. Together they slit open the box, Rosa's face shining in excitement. But *Great Expectations* wasn't in the pile. Rosa's eyes spilled over with tears.

"Oh honey!" Miss Turner exclaimed. She patted Rosa's back. "It's just an old book, there are plenty of others."

"I-It's not that," Rosa sobbed, "We n-never have any good b-books. Th-they're always old an-and... it's not fair."

Miss Turner's face tensed. "I know." Then she gave Rosa a handkerchief and a battered copy of *A Christmas Carol*. When Rosa stopped crying and left, Miss Turner started rearranging books viciously. "Separate

but equal indeed,” she muttered furiously as she slammed down an out-of-date encyclopedia.

Rosa came by the next day to return her book. “It was very good, Miss Turner...and thank you.” Miss Turner nodded.

“Rosa” she said, “I know you’re angry. I am too. But don’t you show that anger. You must be courteous. You must be the voice of reason. That’s the *only* way to achieve your means.”

“Yes Miss Turner, but-”

“No buts,” Miss Turner said sternly, “You wouldn’t want to get the Ku Klux Klan angry, would you?”

“No Miss Turner” Rosa said, eyes wide and fearful. A man had been lynched that week.

“Now,” Miss Turner pulled a book off the shelves, “Would you like to try *Oliver Twist*?”

From then on Rosa became a regular patron of the library. She finished a book a day and came back as often. Miss Turner was glad of her company and felt at least the books weren’t going to waste. No it’s more than that, Miss Turner thought; I’m going to run out of books for Rosa to read! But there would be no new books until the whites’ library threw *their* old books out.

Rosa came in one day with a miserable face.

“What’s the matter honey?” Miss Turner said, concerned, “Tell me”

“Well a boy asked me why I read so much... h-he said black girls weren’t smart enough to pass high school... that I shouldn’t be so uppity... and...oh, Miss Turner!” Rosa cried, stricken, “Was he right?”

“Was he right?” Miss Turner said tersely, “He is dead wrong! I passed high school – and I went to a better college than most white folks here can claim! And Rosa, don’t ever let anybody tell you that you can’t do what you want to do!”

“But Miss Turner...” Rosa whispered, “If you went to college why didn’t you get another job?”

“Well,” Miss Turner laughed, “No one was willing to hire a black woman as a lawyer. But you know? Now that I’ve met you, I don’t regret it.” She laughed again as she hugged Rosa.

“Now,” said Miss Turner, “Let’s open this new shipment of books.” Again, they opened the box together. Rosa gasped. Lying on top was an old copy of *Great Expectations*.