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THE LITTLE GIRL

Candy Land

The little girl's skirt ruffles as she sits down on the steps to the school, forgetting how cold the concrete always is as it hits her bottom. She had not felt so good for a couple of days now, and the school nurse was sending her home. As she sits and waits for her mother, she starts thinking about the other kids in the neighborhood and what made her feel so different. Her mind drifts back to the fourth grade class and the seven-letter word the teacher had written on the board, "SLAVERY." The teacher asked, "Does anyone know what this word means?" The little girl thought to herself, "Oh yes, I know what it means. It means that people just look at you from the outside not caring what is on the inside." At least that is how her Grandmother, whom she so affectionately calls "MaDear" had told her. She wanted to tell the kids in her class about her MaDear, but she somehow knew she could not. Because, you see, her momma is white and her step-dad is black and her momma had told her not to tell anyone ever. The day before, the little girl had been at the house of her best friend Leigh. Leigh was an interesting little girl with blonde hair and blue eyes. She wanted so much to be just like her momma. Her daddy was a drunk and Leigh always seemed to go the extra mile to avoid him. The little girl spent a lot of time at Leigh's house. This one day in particular she was telling Leigh that her daddy had been trying to touch on her while she was trying to sleep. Leigh said that it was okay because she was just a nigger and it did not matter what happened to niggers. The little girl looked at Leigh and thought for a minute and then she said, "But I look like you. I am white like you, and I try to be nice like you." Leigh just looked at her and said, "But you are not like me. You live with a nigger, so that makes you a nigger!" The little "nigger" girl ran home.

All the other children have left to go home, but the little nigger girl is still waiting for her momma. She is really feeling bad now. It is starting to get dark and she is feeling scared. She sees her momma across the street at the store and runs to meet her. Her momma hollers for her to get in the car and shut up. So that is what she does.

Time passes by, and the little girl has grown into a teenager. She waits for the bus. Her hands are sweaty and her face is hot. The bus comes to a stop. She steps on board and sits in the first seat she comes to because she knows she cannot sit in the back. The familiar black faces talk amongst each other while the white faces are hollering and throwing things from the bus. She does not dare talk to the black kids because the white kids will make fun of her, and she does not talk to the white kids because she is not as good as they are. All she knows is she is different. The bus comes to a stop, and she tries to focus on the back of the seat in front of her while the white boys and girls pass her by.

She remembers softball practice after school today as she grabs her books and stuffs them into her book bag. The metal seat is cold as she sits down. The coach is calling the starters' names. She listens, but her name is still not called. The coach announces that the team will be having a swim party. It will be this weekend. She cringes at the thought of going to the party. She has plenty of time to think about the party while warming the bench for the next hour and a half.

The water is cool and feels good on this hot summer day. As she swims around in the pool, one of the girls says, "Niggers are not allowed in my pool. You're a nigger lover." The teenage girl moves to the edge of the pool and pulls herself out of the water. She remains there for the duration of the party.

Oh, open your eyes.
Can't you see?
We are the same,
You and me.
People with thoughts
People with feelings
People who are the same,
You and me!

The young lady stands at the entryway to the stage. As she looks out into the audience, she sees many familiar faces. People mostly dressed in overalls and sundresses. She is nervous and tries to remind herself not to hold on to the right side of her gown, but she does it anyway, all the while trying to remember what the reason was for entering this beauty pageant. The reason was probably because her coach had told her that she had just as many accomplishments as anyone else and that she was just as pretty. The contestants enter the stage single file, and as the announcer calls out all of the names of the contestants, she sees her father, his male lover, and her brother enter into the cafeteria. They are all dressed in tuxedos and stick out like penguins in the rainforest. Then she walks to the front of the stage to have all of her accomplishments listed. Her father stands up and claps and hollers for her to win. She watches as most of the auditorium turns around to stare at him as if he has lost his mind. She wishes she could just turn around and run away.

She waits on the front steps of the high school for her father to pull the car around. One of the contestants walks by and mumbles, "Not only are you a nigger lover, but your daddy's a queer." She is not sure what the word "queer" meant. She just knows that once again she feels different inside from how everyone else seems to feel. She is confused because her outsides are like everyone else's, but her insides are definitely different.

She knows this because she has felt this way all of her life. The gown she is wearing suddenly feels bigger as her insides shrink.

The raindrops fall into her eyes as she sits on the stump in the middle of the clearing. These woods had been in her family for a long time and are adjacent to her grandparents' place. It is hard to tell the raindrops from the tears that are rolling down her face. She has come home once again to find the doors locked and the family sitting around the table eating. She has been told many times that no one has sent any child support and they can't afford to feed her. What has she done that is so bad? What makes those other kids worthy of being fed, but not her? She wonders as she sits alone. The sadness engulfs her and she suddenly feels a surge of anger from deep within. She does not know it at this time, but the damage that is being done now will be irreparable.

Look into her eyes and what
Do you see, but pain and hate
And misery.
No one to talk to,
In whom to confide,
She holds the truth deep inside:
We are all the same,
But the truth she must hide.

The woman holds the coffee cup as steady as she can, while trying to light a cigarette and walk to her seat. The room is filled with smoke and the smell of old nicotine from years past. She bows her head as the meeting is started with the Serenity Prayer. She hears her name as she is called upon to speak. The people clap as she walks to the podium. She says, "My name is Sarah and I am an alcoholic. I have had to learn a lot of lessons in my life. Some of the lessons were learned the hard way and some were learning experiences that were not so tough to get through. I have learned that no one can hurt me unless I let them, and that no one is any better or less than me. This is important because I did suffer from 'I'm a piece of crap' syndrome at one time in my life. Today I know that I am no different from anyone else. The years I spent comparing my insides to everyone else's outsides were wasted. Today I do not have to apologize for my family. My father was gay and my step-dad is black. My father contracted AIDS and died. I am okay with these facts today. I do not have to hide. These differences make me similar to the suffering people who continue to walk through this door of Alcoholics Anonymous. I have learned to look for the similarities instead of the differences, just like I believe God does when he looks at us. He looks at us as if we are all the same. As tears begin to swell up in her eyes, she says, "I am here not only because I am an alcoholic, but because you are the only people who never said that I don't belong here, or that I should go away. You love me because of who I am on the inside and you do not judge me because of where I come from or who my parents are. I do not have to be rich or wear the nicest clothes or pretend I am somebody I'm not. You just love me."