

## True Colors

Black girls hate me, and white girls snicker. I'm definitely not black or white, so the world hates me; gray is what so carelessly runs through my veins. Being honey isn't so sweet, being mixed isn't so special, and, because of my "uniqueness", a frequent ache overpowers my heart whenever I look at the list of ethnicities that I have to so casually choose from. Who wants to be an "other" — who wants to be unusual? Grey is no flattering color, and, although my mother compliments my beauty and speaks of my lovely yellow tint in high admiration, I cannot help but to turn away because of this invisible title that sticks to my head — boldly proclaiming: "rare species".

Hayley always had a long introduction. She hated to blend as much as she hated to wander in the shadows of others. Being of darker color people assumed that she was pure African American, but Hayley was packed with Mexican spice. She was born with the heart of a true Mexican, but with the color of an African American. She hated when people stopped to ask me about my race but glanced away from her rich browns. She despised when, after catching a person's interest and finally tying in the topic of race within the conversation, they would say, "so even though you were born in Mexico, you're still African American right?" How could you not loath a person who only sees the surface? How can you not hate a friend for unintentionally gaining the interest of everybody because of unusual features that speak of one race but possesses the pigment of another? I would. Therefore, I scrub harder every night.

My grandfather speaks to me of my Arawak roots. He pokes my nose and sings, "Buck girl beauty": After my typical sigh, he gives me a heavy scowl and firmly states, "Be proud of your heritage, of your features and of the curiosity of others. Your great grandfather was chief; your heritage has history that is shown from the outside. You can see this in the uniqueness of your skin, the curls of your hair, and the browns of your eyes. Be proud." I could not understand why he so desperately wanted my approval. It was impossible to approve of my outward appearance when I received criticism of my color. I was judged with stereotypes of mixed children, or fair-skinned girls; I was frequently called yellow-boned and "light-skinned" child. I hated the names and thought, "whatever happened to using my own?"

After making my way to my room, miserable from another day of "yellow-boned" taunts, my mother approached me with a half of a sandwich and a hug full of understanding. A few minutes of inviting silence past between us, and then I finally broke down in tears, confessing my hate for my skin color. She squeezed me tighter and whispered, "come with me". She led me to our family album one that I have paid great attention to already. I gracefully tried to pull away, hoping to escape her aspirations of helping, but she only held me tighter mumbling "no you don't." She opened the album and pointed to a few pictures that I had already seen many times before but was blind to my personal connection. There, sitting in a chair whose color presented her as an African American, was my grandmother. A grin as long and wide as the Mississippi was plastered on her face while she wrapped her arms around my mother, who at eight had skin like mine, fiery red hair, and emeralds for eyes. My mother turned to me and said, "growing up I

remember many different people asking my Grandma if she was my nanny; we looked so unlike but were so very alike.” She was not ashamed that I looked like her mother, with the same yellow color you have. She was not embarrassed about my red hair, or my green eyes, and, although we stood separate by society’s standards, we stood together in blood and in love—color was an obstacle we faced together.”

The next day I carried the picture in my jacket pocket, feeling it press against my heart where I knew it would remain. I faced every bully, every tormentor, and every question that I was presented with. I spoke of my heritage, of my color, and of my family; proud of whom I was and where my roots came from. I knew that I lived in my own world, but that that was ok...because they knew me here.