

Diamond

By Glenn Currier

The little girl, clean and proud of her hair,
carefully braided the night before by her old aunt,
stands near the wall of the large room
as if she were a small rickety table
that did not deserve to be in plain sight
with the other useful polished furniture.

Her outsized threadbare dress,
passed down to her from an older cousin,
hangs loosely on her slender frame.
She is lost here, an afterthought,
a question mark,
separated from her older brother
who is off exploring,
doing what little boys do.

Finally she drifts quietly to a computer
where she sits hoping to remain unnoticed,
trying to type like her brother had taught her.
She is relieved the keys are not loud
as she types a note to her mother
knowing it will never be sent
because her mom is no longer around.
Tears stream down her face
mixing with faint memories
and sadness.

Then a shadow crosses the keyboard.
She feels a looming presence
and anxiety squirts into her stomach.
A stern low-pitched voice pierces her silent reverie:
"Little girl, what are you doing here?
Don't you know the rule about kids on computers?"
"No mam, I didn't, I'm sorry," she says.
And in a voice reverberating in the large room,
several adults turning around to see,
In a near shout, the woman says,
"Don't lie to me. I've seen you in here before!"

The child cowers, her shoulders stooped,
trying to be as insignificant as she fels.

I wonder how long the tears,
sprung from tenderness for her mother,
will stay dry
blocked by this dark invasion
of fear
and how long it will haunt her.

I still remember the fifth grade
when standing with the others,
I was jumping around my desk,
thrilled we were going home for the day.
And suddenly I heard a loud swat
and then felt the sting of the board
on my little butt.

In school I had been a well-behaved child
and this was a first for me.
I still recall the total shock
yes--the horror--that a teacher would do this.
The disillusionment of that moment
would stay with me for a long time.
My own exuberance, it seemed, had betrayed me.
But more poignant
was the loss of trust.

What diamonds have we crushed
what bright metal tarnished
when we adults raise our voices,
speak down to children
or even to each other
with that edge that says:
"I do not cherish you."

Would we speak with the same inflection
the same tone and volume
if the other were a mayor
a president,
or a Nobel Prize winner?

It is so easy to forget
that respect and compassion
should always trump power and ego,
that every other person
however jagged their edges
however rough their exterior,
with care and proper handling,
can be revealed
and sparkle
as diamond.

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