

The Cloth of New Beginnings

By Areeba Haque, grade 7

As I sat in the back seat of the car, watching the world pass by outside the window, a mix of emotions came over me. Relief that I had finally escaped the hell that was my home. Fear of what the future would hold. Sadness that my life had to come to this. I glanced over at my reflection in the window. I could see slight bruises on my face, mostly covered by my dark scrawny hair. I let my body relax, putting my elbow on the rim of the window as my eyelids slowly began to droop.

“Why did you do this? I TOLD YOU OVER 50 TIMES. And you still messed it up.”

“Don’t blame me! It’s always her fault.” My mother argued, pointing right at me. They both glanced at me with cold sharp looks of contempt. I was sitting down in the corner of the home, hiding beside a miniscule coffee table filled with multiple beer cans. He started walking towards me, with his fists clenched, and his veins pulsating. I tried cowering back even more, but the rough coarse wall had already scraped my skin. The odor of chemicals and overripe fruit began to waft closer to me. And as the weight inside my chest increased, my brain seemed to slow down. Before I knew it, the man who I knew as my father grabbed me by my dress’s collar, pinning me to the rough wall. A cold hard slap landed right on my face as I began to lose my senses.

I could no longer talk.

I could no longer hear.

I could no longer smell.

I could no longer see.

And I could no longer feel.

And just like that, my life had changed.

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My hands were shaking and my heart was pounding. The car radio was blaring some pop songs but I couldn't focus on the music. The events of the past day kept looping through my mind.

I was so thankful that someone outside had heard my cries. I believed I would never escape the inferno I lived through. I couldn't think of a single day that would go by without me being hit by my father. Yet here I was on my way to a foster home.

"Inhala," an affable voice uttered, "Is everything alright?" It was the child service's driver. He paused for a minute. "I'm taking you to your new home now, and I'll introduce you to your new family. I promise, they will be much better for you, Moon. That's what your name is, right?"

I was startled when he said my name so I couldn't find any words to say. Even though I knew it was disrespectful, not a single word would come out of my mouth. I tried peeking a little at the driver's face in the rearview mirror, hoping he wasn't irritated. Noticing my face, he looked at the mirror, and gave me a reassuring smile. Embarrassed, I quickly shot my face away and looked back outside again. However, when I looked out, something I had never seen before rolled out in front of my eyes. Bright green trees and perfectly manicured lawns lined the driveways of posh enormous houses, substantially bigger than the prison of a place I lived in. It seemed like all the houses had two floors, some of which had fancy fenced floating decks. Marveling at the scene around me finally gave me some of my confidence to speak.

"Yeah, I'm fine. I-is this the neighborhood where I'm staying?" I ask as politely as I can.

"Yep. Tricherry Orchard." He said, with a light chuckle. Almost like it had a warmness to it. A faint smile appeared on my face, before it quickly vanished.

Before Dad would get mad at me, he always had a smile. But a cold dark smile, as if a warning that I had done something wrong. You don't want to know how he was when he laughed.

I put my head down, sitting still in my seat, and prayed that he wouldn't do anything. But instead when I looked up again, he was just singing along to the radio. *Was he not mad? Or was he too mad to even do anything? Or, was this... normal?* I know I was supposed to be safe now, but I couldn't help but

feel like this was a trap. I looked for the last time at his face, and it didn't seem like his joyful expression had changed.

SCREECH!

After a few minutes, the car came to a halt in front of an immense house, in the same luxurious style as the other houses. I became hypnotized once again by the divine view outside. I tried to look away from the surreal view, but I couldn't. I was surely dreaming. As I was getting ready to leave, the driver's voice suddenly interrupted my thoughts once more.

"One last thing before we leave, Moon." The driver said in a grim tone. He stretched his arm to the passenger seat and grabbed something but I couldn't tell what it was. I suddenly froze up in my spot. He twisted himself around and met my gaze. I swallowed, pushing all the tension I had into the pit of my stomach. I began to open my mouth hesitantly until suddenly— he slowly began to move his hands toward me, his fingers curling into a rigid ball shape. I felt my airways slowly getting blocked as his grasp became tighter and tighter with whatever he was holding. I almost imagined myself back in prison, feeling myself backing into the glass table as my father inched closer to me. I squeezed my eyes shut and cowered down. But just as I did, something strange happened.

"Keep this." He said, opening his fist, revealing a small piece of ripped clothing. It had bright and vivid blue and red patterns, but it had started to wear off on the edges, with the threads poking out from all sides. I warily began to reach my arms towards the clothing, unsure whether this was a trap or not.

"Why?" I ask, in a soft low voice.

"Because, I was just like you once." I met his gaze, and slowly softened my expression. "As a child, I grew up with my uncle, since both my parents had died after getting mixed up in some precarious business in Cuba. Everyday with some excuse, he would beat me or humiliate me or scream at me," he paused, "Even tell me I should've died with my parents."

"I-I'm truly..." I began, but I stopped when I saw his eyes, now filled with tears.

“But, that’s when I met my new parents. They weren’t that wealthy, nevertheless, they still tried their best to care for me. And when I first moved in, my adoptive mother decided to cut off a piece of one of her dresses. She gave me the piece she cut off and called it, “The Cloth to New beginnings.” He added cheesily, glancing back at the cloth in my hands now. “So, I want you to keep it--as a gift to *your* new beginning. When the organization told me your story, I knew how you felt. I could empathize with you. Although, as a worker my job isn’t to pick which clients I want to take, but you were an exception. But that’s beside the point. Moon, just promise me you will keep this as a reminder to never lose hope, even when it seems impossible to. In time, your life will be a better place.” He tenderly said, smiling at me.

I smiled back at him, genuinely. The tense feeling I had in my gut a few minutes ago was no longer there. He twisted back in his seat and collected my files from the passenger seat. I slowly opened the door, placing my feet on the solid ground, and stepped out in the bright sunlight. I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath.

As I stood in front of the house, gingerly rubbing the cloth in my hand, I couldn’t help but feel a sense of hope. I didn’t know what the future held, but for the first time in a long time, I didn’t feel hopeless. I felt like I had a chance. To heal, to have a new beginning, and to finally be free.