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Workshop Submission

11 February 2016

Painful Memories

“Miss, I’m ready for you.” A pleasant voice said from the doorway of the tiny waiting room. I looked up from my newspaper. My counselor is a short blonde woman, maybe in her mid-fifties. I quickly gather my coat and bag from the floor and force myself to my feet. I follow this woman down the hall to her office. The lights are dim inside but some light flutters through the window blinds.

“Take a seat” the woman offers, gesturing to two large arm chairs. I take the one closest to the door. My heart is racing and my palms sweat, I briefly wonder what I am doing here. How could this really help? The woman sits down in a desk chair in front of me. She introduces herself and runs through her welcoming speech. I’m not really listening though, I’m focused too hard on what I will say when she stops talking, how I will explain what exactly I’m feeling.

“We don’t have much time today” she tells me “but is there anything specific you want to talk about today?” This question is not what I am expecting, I was hoping her speech would be longer. I still have no idea what to say. Suddenly a memory springs up from the depths of my muddled mind.

Its summer, family friends are coming over for a barbeque. I help my mom get everything ready for this evening. We marinade the chicken, make macaroni salad, tidy up the house, and wash off the back porch. I always help mom, because Johnny is too little and Dad can’t. Mom is quiet today, I think she’s angry but I don’t say anything. That’s what I always do, I stay quiet and do as I’m asked to avoid getting yelled at. It takes a long time to get ready for barbeques with just the two of us but we get it all done.

When Mom and I finish I go to my room. I clean it up a little, but mostly I just hide everything in my closet. I tell myself I will clean it up later, but my mom will find it and I will get in trouble for it in a couple of days. I’m too excited to clean anyway. I love when people come over. There is never any yelling, or door slamming, or even any tension. Mom always happily visits with the other moms but Dad usually stays quiet. Mom is always happier when other people are here but Dad doesn’t seem to care much one way or another.

Finally our friends arrive. Aunt Marcia and Uncle Jeff are usually here first so that they can help finish getting ready. Tanisha is with them, she is my best friend and always has been. I go to her house a lot, especially when there is yelling. Tanisha and I go to my room, we play while we wait for the others. Soon the others join us, Savannah and Joci in my room, Sierra helping our parents, and Jacoy and Jay with Johnny out in the yard.

Everything is ready now. A blanket is laid on the grass for the kids to eat on. The boys are running around the yard shooting each other with nerf guns but us girls are sitting on the blanket eating grapes. Savannah and Tanisha are swallowing them whole and challenging Joci and I to do it. Joci does it once just to prove she can but I can’t. My dad and Mike are grilling the chicken and drinking beer, while the moms sit at the big table talking and laughing.

When the chicken is done, the moms help us get out plates and we all sit down on the blanket. Sierra is older so she sits at the table but Jacoy stays with us. We all laugh and joke, soon enough the food is gone and my mom has called me to help with dessert. I love this part, today we made banana cream pie. My job is to put the whipped cream on top before we cut it, it’s a fast job so soon enough we are carrying the pies out to the big table. Mom cuts the pies and I help hand them out and get everyone forks. Everyone has gathered around the big table now. It’s almost completely dark now but everyone is still full of energy. Kids sit in the laps of their parents or sit on the porch railing as the adults tell stories.

I’m standing in front of the back door beside my dad. He says something sarcastic and smiles at me. I look at him, stunned. His smile is worn and gentle his eyes sparkle with humor but I’m not listening anymore. I’m too overtaken with shock, this is not an expression I can ever recall seeing. Sudden tightness in my chest overwhelms me, I make and excuse and flee into the house. I run for my room, collapsing onto my bed hiding my face in the pillows. This is where I go when I am afraid. I’m not as afraid as I normally am though, there is no yelling in the background. There is no slamming of doors or name calling. Johnny is outside playing with his friends, not hiding in his room to avoid any of the anger being redirected at him.

There is no reason to be afraid but all I can think is, he can smile? There has never been any proof of this since I can remember. I thought the accident took that away. I thought he was broken. I start to cry, I don’t know why but that is what I always do when my parents yell.

I am back in the counselor’s office. She is looking at me worriedly. “Is there anything you would like to talk about?” she asks again. I shake my head, “Nothing specifically” I say finally finding my voice. She nods and starts pulling out papers from a folder on her desk, she’s saying something but I’m still not listening.