

2017 Elie Wiesel Competition

Honorable Mention Senior Poetry

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Our Stars

There's a child.

An infant, an innocent, is an image of the future.

I've told her of our culture's history as dark-skinned people

And she likes to ask me questions about what plays on the news.

One day, she comes home, and sits down before me.

Silently, I gaze as she slows her usually swinging legs,

And lets them hang down from the chair, lifeless/

She looks up at me with her big brown orbs,

And stares till I see myself staring back in her eyes.

She then rummages through her coat pocket,

And withdraws from it a dark and crusty circle.

I take it gently from her young hands,

Take notice of the familiarity of the weight,

And look back at her in confusion.

"Mama," she asks, "What is that?"

And I, befuddled, respond back

"I don't know darling, what is it?"

She arises from her place,

Smiling eagerly as she take the button and walks it to the sink.

"It's a coin, Mama. Can't you tell?"

I watch as she struggles on her tiptoes

Reaches for the faucet,

And runs her fingers, tinny and frail, under the cleanser.

The grim and rust of the concealer

Wash away to reveal the concealed,

And rush down the spiral of the drain,

Disappearing from sight.

She hands back to me

A newly shining coin

Sparkling as if a star,

And glistening under the radiating happiness of the girl.

“Now Mama,” She starts. “How much was the coin worth before I washed it?”

And I answer her after inspecting the illuminated branding.

She implores further. “How much is it worth now?”

Again, I reply the same monetary value.

I pick up the metallic circle and look over it. “Why did you show me this coin?”

She beams, with a hint of keen playfulness in her stride.

“Because no matter what the appearance or positioning of this coin,

It was worth the same.”

With a triumphant look adorning her face so small,

She marches back to the table, plops herself down in the seat,

And begins swinging her little legs once more.

My kids who hates naps, who hates spinach, and hates cough syrup,

Took my stories and our past to heart.

She knows not to hate the classmate for wearing a hijab,

Knows to be caring to her friend regardless of color,

Knows the difference between prejudice and kindness.

My dark-skinned girl isn't worthless for what you see her as.
That Jewish child isn't valued any less than what you think him to be.
This Muslim man isn't the animal they present him as.
My child needs to be taught
How to think, not what.
She needs to be educated of her predecessors' racist and unjust mistakes
So she can learn and appreciate.
She needs to be raised as a valuable individual,
Unique and special,
To brilliantly burst her way into a bright future
Alongside peers, they can beat the inequity
Disclose to the narrow-minded
And guide us to a better future for their generations to improve further.
Bigotry isn't some fad we went through.
Hate and prejudice is born everyday
And stems from fear and ignorance.
No ill-conceived judgment is born in our pure and untainted children.
Our over-bearing society sears those preconceptions into their minds.
It's a rough, difficult journey to righteousness
But stars can't shine without darkness.
And I believe in our children.