



The Beauty of Contrast (name withheld)

Almost every day I encounter prejudice; usually it is subtle, but occasionally it is more obvious. I have endured judgmental stares, and I have overheard rude comments. I've felt uncomfortable in my own skin. I have sat by myself and questioned my sense of reality—could I be imagining these things? I've tried hard not to become angry and defensive, because I am not an angry person. I am a seventeen year old Caucasian girl living in America, and this I believe: One of the greatest tragedies of this country is that we have not fully embraced the idea of equality.

My perceived discrimination is not because I am a female. I am not disabled in any way, and I am not a minority. No, I am not looked down on because of race or sex or any feature with which I was born. I have been in an interracial relationship for over two and a half years. My boyfriend, Yusuf, and I are not blinded by the color of the other's skin. Sometimes I comment on the way our hands look when they are intertwined, pointing out the beauty in the contrast. We often discuss our backgrounds and share our cultures, careful not to let our differences become barriers in our relationship. Rising above outside judgment, however, has proven to be an ongoing and often difficult task.

When I started dating Yusuf, my parents worried. They are extremely open-minded individuals, and they have always taught me to accept all people without regard to race. They had, however, witnessed the baggage that comes with interracial relationships. My mother's best friend, Kay, and her white husband, Brad, had recently come back from a trip down South with stories of scornful looks and disrespectful words. Kay had even been accused of kidnapping, when a woman in a supermarket saw her light-skinned children and couldn't believe that they were the offspring of a black woman.

My mother did not want me or Yusuf to have to deal with such narrow-mindedness and contempt, and I don't blame her. I was not afraid, though. I knew that nothing would ever change if people were too afraid to follow their hearts and love who they wanted to love. Today, I feel a bittersweet happiness. It breaks my heart to know that Yusuf experiences prejudice in a way that I will never fully understand, but sharing the past two and a half years with him has been a blessing. My extended family still does not know about our relationship, because, like much of America, they do not approve of racial mingling. It is my hope that people will someday learn to accept each other, even if they cannot understand each other. I believe in equality.