

One More Rainbow

By Stephen J. Cramer

Once Upon A Time, there was a little girl who sat down to paint a picture. She wanted it to be the most beautiful picture she had ever made and hoped it would last forever. So she found a large sturdy canvas, took out her best brushes and paints, and began to create her masterpiece.

It was a daunting task, but the paint flowed easily from her brush and she could see her ideas, beliefs, and passions pour themselves onto the canvas. She painted a beautiful sky, little animals, children playing, babies smiling, and rainbows. Not just one rainbow—hundreds of rainbows. The little girl loved rainbows, and each one she painted was quite different from any other. Every one of them was incredibly beautiful. She had finished, and went to tell her mother. But she had left her paints open.

When she came back, someone had ruined her painting by splashing black paint onto the canvas. The little girl cried, and her mother could offer no amount of comfort to make up for the girl's loss. Everyone believed the painting was ruined and told her to throw it away and just paint another one. But the little girl couldn't do that. She just stopped painting.

After a long time, she decided to try again. So the little girl once again gathered her paints, and her brushes. She took one last look at her beautiful painting and then covered it with a fresh coat of white paint. She was going to start over.

This time the paint didn't flow so easily. She tried to paint the same beautiful sky, the same little animals, the children, and the babies. But this time she could only manage to paint one rainbow. She finished and stood back to look at her picture. It was a nice painting, but it really wasn't what she wanted. Everyone who looked at it thought it was wonderful. Her mother said it was the best painting she ever saw. (Mothers are supposed to say things like that.)

The little girl wasn't really happy with what she saw. She kept looking at the painting and began to imagine the wonderful rainbows that were hidden beneath. She thought that maybe if she just scratched away the surface a little that she might be fortunate enough just to reveal one of her beautiful rainbows and not the black painted

sections. So she scraped and cut away a little of the still wet paint and thought she saw a glimpse of color. She scraped off some more paint and more color shone through. She was so pleased as she believed that this would be a great way to keep the best of both paintings.

Each day the girl scratched away a little more paint. She knew the black was underneath, but she so wanted to see her rainbows again so she took a chance. Finally it happened—a large black area surfaced from beneath. The girl stopped, looked again at her ruined painting and began to cry. All she wanted to do was see one more rainbow—just one more.

Everyone who saw the painting noticed the black spots, but thought her painting was nice anyway, and coaxed the girl into showing it to everybody for miles around. The girl resisted, but in the end she allowed people to see it. There were many comments, of course. One person wondered why she didn't just leave well enough alone and be happy with the new painting without trying to save the old one. Someone else thought that the black was "an interesting artistic expression". Another wondered why she didn't just paint over all of it and start again. But the little girl had put away her brushes and paints and tried to forget about that which she lost, what she herself had ruined.

As time passed, the painting became less important to the girl. She had resigned herself to accept the painting the way it was, and not expect more. She gave up the dream of seeing any more of her beloved rainbows. In fact, one Christmas when her church asked people for things to be auctioned, the little girl took but a moment to retrieve her once precious painting from under the bed, and donate it in the hope that it might raise a few dollars to help ease someone else's pain.

On the night of the auction people came from miles around to see all the things that had been donated and bid on their favorites. There were crystal music boxes, exquisite vases, beautiful hand-painted carousel horses, and an antique clock. Someone had even donated a classic car! There were many treasures to see, and it looked like the auction would be a huge success. The little girl tried to bid on a locket, but was quickly outbid by several people offering much more than she could afford.

Finally, when the auction was finished, someone noticed a painting leaning against the wall that hadn't been sold. The painting had looked damaged, so no one had thought anyone would want it. After all, it had horrible black spots on it. But the auctioneer thought it might be worth something to someone, so he held it up and asked if anyone wanted it.

“One million dollars”—the crowd was suddenly silenced. The auctioneer couldn’t believe his ears. He asked the person who gave the bid to step forward, and repeat his bid. “I bid one million dollars, that’s everything I have”. An old man stepped forward, a stranger to everyone at the church. The auctioneer laughed along with everyone there and told the man that the painting was barely worth anything at all since it was so ruined. The old man was astonished—“Don’t you see these rainbows? Don’t you wonder if there are more underneath this new surface? Are you all blind?” The people were silent for a moment as they looked again at the painting, then at the old man. Then they laughed and laughed as they left the church. The auctioneer handed the painting to the man and told him to just take it.

The old man took the painting and cradled it in his arms, treating the ruined painting as his greatest treasure. The little girl ran after him. Through her tears, she told him that it was her painting that she loved it so, and about what had happened so long ago. The old man consoled the little girl and told her how much he wanted to see all the rainbows, even if it meant that he would see the blackness. He said it didn’t matter to him. He was an artist too, and planned to scrape away the *black* paint as well to see what it had covered. The girl hadn’t thought to do that. She was only able to see the blackness as something that could not be changed. Then the man asked the girl if she would like to help him carefully remove the extra layers that she had painted. He explained to her that he knew he was taking a great risk of destroying one of her rainbows, but if they did it together, they could work together to paint a new one to replace any that might be damaged.

So they worked together, side by side, the old man and the little girl, carefully scraping away all the layers of paint that the girl had used to cover her mistakes. Sometimes they found a beautiful rainbow underneath that was still intact, but often the rainbows were so horribly damaged that they decided to paint new ones in their place. It took them many, many years to fully restore that little girl’s dream—in fact when they were finished the old man was a little older, but the little girl had become a woman.

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