

Embracing Change

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Embracing Change

Complacent Arkansas was a gray, gray village. Everything in it was gray. Even the streets were painted gray. All the people wore gray clothes and had a dull gray tint to their skin. The children played games as children do, but there was a dull cast over everything they'd do. Well'Enough and his cousin and only friend, I'Fits Knott lived in a small cottage at the edge of the village, where it met the woods. I'Fits'Knott didn't mind playing with Well'Enough, but she longed to play with dolls and jump rope with the other girls in the village. None of the other girls ever, even once, played with her, and none of them jumped rope.

One day I'Fits Knott was sitting under the huge branches of Shade'Tree crying because she was so lonely for girl company. Nearby, Well'Enough was skipping stones across the pond and whistling to himself as always. Shade'Tree, who was hard of hearing, felt the small girl leaning against its trunk, but did not hear her sobbing until she had been sitting there for a long, long time.

“What’s the matter, little human?” asked Shade'Tree. I'Fits Knott was so startled to hear Shade'Tree speak, she forgot to sniffle as she stopped crying.

“None of the girl children will play with me,” she sobbed. She choked on her words, as the sadness of being alone started her crying again.

“What?” shouted Shade'Tree. He did not hear her because he was hard of hearing, and her words were muffled by her sniffing and sobbing. I'Fits Knott stopped crying altogether and opened her eyes wide. Shade'Tree had actually shouted and she didn't know he could even speak until a minute ago.

“No one plays with Well'Enough and me, ever,” she said loud enough for Shade'Tree to hear as she leaned her head against his huge trunk.

“I understand,” he told her, as he rustled his lowest branch to make the leaves brush her cheeks. That was the closest he could get to a hug. He sighed and a whispering sound was heard in his top branches. “I've been waiting a long time for you to ask for my help,” he said softly. “Listen carefully and do what I tell you to do; and things will be different in this village.

Will you do that?"

"Yes" she said shouting, now that she knew he was hard of hearing. The loud sound of her voice caused Well'Enough to turn around and say "what?" She didn't answer him because she wasn't talking to him, but to Shade'Tree. She snuggled even closer to the huge trunk and it seemed as though a hollow place formed there, almost like a lap in which she felt safe. Shade'Tree began softly to tell her how everything would be different after she and Well'Enough completed the instructions which he'd been waiting to give them.

"You and your young cousin over there must go up the mountain and find Babbling Brook. Oldman'River lives at the top of the hill beside it. Tell him who you are, and he will help you to make everything different. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she replied, softly. She was astonished by the instruction, but it did not seem strange to her. No stranger than speaking with a tree.

"Go soon," he said "and make the difference." I'Fits Knott felt better, although she didn't quite understand who Oldman'River was or how to find Babbling Brook. She knew she would try, because making the difference sounded like a good thing to her.

She pranced over to where Well'Enough was still skipping rocks across the pond and shook him by the shoulder. He handed her a stone. Maybe she wanted to play this game after all, he thought to himself. She had refused his offer to skip stones before. She held the stone with one hand and pushed hard on his shoulder with the other. Well'Enough knew she wanted to tell him something and she wanted him to hear her. He turned to the slight girl and said, "what?" in his most annoyed voice.

"I have the best news," I'Fits Knott blurted out, ignoring his annoyance. "What news? Nothing ever happens here. Plus all you was doing was sitting under Shade'Tree feeling sorry for yourself 'cause the girl children won't play with you."

"Well Shade'Tree told me how to make things different, and you have to come with me, because we have to do it together."

“Where are you going?” Well’Enough asked, not at all surprised that she claimed Shade’Tree had spoken to her. He had spoken to Shade’Tree before, but he did not tell her about their conversations. “Up to Babbling Brook,” she replied with joy in her voice.

“OK”, replied Well’Enough and went back to skipping stones across the pond.

At the crack of dawn they set out for the mountain to find Babbling Brook and Oldman’River. They walked all day until the sun set and then they camped out under a huge tree near the river. While they slept in their bags, several small animals came by to see who was in their back yard. None disturbed them. The next crack of dawn the following day they were up and continued their trek to find Oldman’River. They stopped to eat lunch, and waited for the day to cool, before beginning the journey to Babbling Brook. Just before the second day ended they reached their destination. They didn’t know how to find Oldman’River, but thought whoever lived behind the large door at the side of the huge rock overlooking the brook would know. They walked up to the door holding hands and knocked. The noise of the water dancing over the stones and boulders nearby was deafening. They had to knock hard and more than once. A man’s voice asked who was there. They told the voice behind the door they were looking for Oldman’River.

“I’m Oldman’River, who wants to see me,” but the door did not open to let them in.

“I’m Well’Enough, and my cousin is I’Fits Knott, and Shade’Tree told us to come to see you and you will tell us how to make the difference in our village of Complacent Arkansas.”

“Okay, sit by the brook and listen for the secret word and when you hear it clear, clear, come back and I’ll tell you how to make the difference.”

The two children found a nice clear spot, and began to listen to the brook. All they heard was noise. “I don’t hear any words,” said I’Fits Knott, a little miffed at not being invited inside. Here it was all over again, even Oldman’River didn’t want to see them.

Well’Enough said nothing but gave all his attention to listening. He felt excited all of a sudden, and soon he began to feel as though the brook was singing. He did not hear any words, but a distinct melody began to be repeated over and over again. He nudged I’Fits Knott, as the melody began to repeat. “Hear that,” he said. “Yes,” she replied and they lapsed

into silence as the melody began to soothe them. The more calm they became the more distinct the melody seemed. Then they heard the word, as if by magic, they heard the word. “Change,” sang the brook over and over again, “change.”

They sprang up and ran to the door and knocked loudly. “Did you hear the word?” asked Oldman’River from the inside. “Yes,” they answered in chorus. The door opened and they walked into a huge room with candles burning everywhere and an old man sitting in the far corner with a boy by his side, leaning on the arm of his chair. I’Fits Knott screamed and Well’Enough simply stared. The boy looked exactly like Well’Enough, the only difference his skin didn’t have a gray tone to it. His skin was as shiny, and bright and clear, as they had ever seen skin to look.

“This is Change,” said Oldman’River, smiling, ignoring their surprise. “He’ll go back with you and help you make the difference. But first have something to eat and rest for a the night.” For the first time they noticed the table set for four with wonderful fruits of many colors. Not a one was gray. The children had many questions and Oldman’River smiled as he answered every one of their questions. The one they kept repeating was how did Change get to look exactly like Well’Enough, except that he was not gray, his skin was bright and shiny.

“Change is your twin brother. Before you were born, the village of Complacent Arkansas was a colorful place and the people were very happy. No one had a gray cast to their skin. All the children in the village liked one another and played together all the time. Then one day a traveling salesman came to village with all sort of new gadgets. The people didn’t trust him, so they wouldn’t buy any of his gadgets. The Mayor, Mr. Stikin Mudd, told the salesman to leave, saying that ‘if it’s not broke don’t fix it’. And all the people shouted ‘leave Well’Enough alone’. So the salesman left and the village turned gray. The salesman had two sons and adopted his brother’s daughter. He left the two of you in the cottage at the edge of village. The third child, your twin brother, he brought here to live with me until you were ready to make a difference.”

The next morning the three children set out for Complacent Arkansas with packs filled with the colorful fruits which tasted so good. They traveled only a day and reached the village. It was dusk when they reached the small cottage at the edge of village. They were very tired so they fell on their beds and slept until the sun came up the next day. I’Fits’Knott was the first to

awaken. She shouted for the boys to get up and make a difference. Well'Enough was so happy at finding his twin brother; he hugged the half asleep boy tightly. The instant he hugged him, Well'Enough felt his body tingle. He was so very happy, now he had someone to play with and that someone was not a girl. He went to brush his teeth and looked in the mirror and saw himself reflected for the first time since he came home. He shouted so loud both Change and I'Fits Knott came into the bathroom to see what was going on. I'Fits Knott screamed because Well'Enough was no longer gray. In her excitement, she pushed him out of the way to see if she too was no longer gray. No, she was still gray, her skin was as shinny as the others.

“How come Well'Enough change and I'm the same gray?” she asked Change, tears welling up in her eyes. Change smiled.

“Well'Enough embraced me, and that took away his gray.” I'Fits'Knott jumped up and hugged Change with all her might. The gray went away at once. The children eat the last of the colorful fruits and went out of the cottage. They said goodbye to Oldman'River and started on their way back to the village. Change came with them. Along the way they caught up on what happened while they were apart. At last they reached the village. They walked to village center. Because it was still early, only a few people were up and about. Someone must have told the Mayor that something had happened to I'Fits Knott and Well'Enough, because he was standing in the village square waiting for them. “What happened to you two?” he asked them loudly.

“We embraced Change and the gray went away,” they both spoke at once. Mr. Stikin Mudd knew a good thing when he saw it; after all he was the Mayor. So, he ran as fast as his pudgy legs could make him and embraced Change. As soon as he let Change go, from the bear hug he'd given him, his skin changed. He rang the village bell and all the people came running to see. The Mayor told them that all of them had to embrace Change and the village would be bright and happy again. All of them did The gray left the village and all the people became happy again. And all the other boys and girls started playing with Well'Enough and I'Fits Knott, and Change. And that's what caused Complacent Arkansas to be such a happy place.