

Black

Only one person knew the truth. After all, no one could see through her brilliant façade, crystalline laughter and dimpled smiles that were full of life. That is, no one other than herself.

People told her to be happy, but to be happy she had to follow the rules. They said the rules were law. At the beginning, she didn't understand. She fought for her personal happiness and freedom, and ended up heartbroken, homeless and hopeless. As she clutched an empty glass bottle, drowning her sorrows in alcohol, unexpected enlightenment came.

They were lying. What they said, they were all lies. They didn't want her to be happy; they wanted her to look happy, to follow every rule and expectation, to conform.

It felt like a thousand shards of glass cutting into her cheeks every time she smiled, a thousand needles piercing her heart every time she laughed, but she kept doing it. After all, they said she was doing well. She went to church every Sunday like the others, only ever spoke English and never mentioned her family. She knew it was shameful to be different; it was shameful to be coloured, shameful to be Aboriginal.

She was a "success". The others, their minds were broken, souls shattered and they had nowhere to stay, suspended in a limbo between light and dark. Too white to be dark, too dark to be truly white, like a broken toy cast to the bottom of a cardboard box, too useless to be played with but too precious to be thrown out.

She stayed in the cruel and unaccepting world, trying to find freedom. She held her mind together with pure will; will to succeed, will to be happy. She pushed herself up when she was

kicked down by society, rising to her feet with pressure of a thousand mountains resting on her shoulders.

Her determination landed her a small job at a retail store. It didn't give particularly high pay, nor did it provide any special merits, but that was to be expected of her education and societal standings. To her, all that mattered was that it was stable and it was enough to support her small apartment and essential needs.

Everything was fine until a few hours ago. She greeted a customer with her practiced smile, politely asking what he needed. He told her he wanted a discount for a purchase, his eyes beseeching and his voice gentle and pleading. She turned away, begging the cruel world to let her go, just once. Sighing, she said in a calm manner, "Sorry, I can't help you with that." His blue eyes suddenly hardened, piercing into her squirming soul. "What did you say? Can't help me? I should have known. You're useless."

"You're useless."

It echoed in her mind, rebounding in empty darkness. The memories surge to the front of her mind, memories buried long ago. Memories she thought were gone.

"No. No. NO!" she shrieked, running frantically to the front of the store. She didn't care who saw her. She had to get outside. She had to breathe. She had to forget.

When she headed back inside, the manager was waiting for her. "You may leave now." His words were resolute and unyielding. "But, I—" Lifting her head to argue, she saw the look on his face. It was a look of pity, wariness and disgust that she didn't want to see. He knew that

there were monsters inside her. He knew. She turned and sprinted blindly back to her apartment a few blocks away at breakneck speed, fat tears rolling down her cheeks.

There were demons crawling underneath her skin. There were screams, muffled screams echoing in her mind, never to be heard again. There was blood leaking from the crimson school ceiling, her blood, children's blood, her peoples' blood.

The darkness surged, grotesque demon rearing its head and clawing its way up her throat. She looked in the mirror. Others would have seen a pretty face, red eyes framed with thick lashes and a strangled smile.

All she saw was darkness.