

The Father's Love

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Gabriel Michelson sat up suddenly when the door to the room he was in opened up. He looked over and saw a young boy peek his head into the room and smile a bright smile. "HI!" The little boy said enthusiastically as he walked in the room.

"Hi..." Gabe said not sure how to take the little boy, and for a moment forgot about anything but the bright purple eyes... he'd never seen anyone with eyes like that. Gabe shook his head as the little boy walked over to the bed he was sitting next to, and looked at the boy lying there. "A friend of yours?" The boy asked looked back at Gabe.

"Well... sort of... at least I hope he'll be. I haven't really talked to him yet... I... I just met him when he was brought in... and Momma Janet said I could sit with him, and be here when he woke up." He wasn't sure why he was telling this little kid everything he did, but it just felt okay.

"That's real cool of you to do that. I think he'll be your friend when he wakes up... speaking of which, it's time for him to wake up."

Gabe shot to his feet and almost shouted, "What... no.. you can't. Mamma Janet's got him sleeping so he won't be in pain! He got burned real bad by his dad; if he wakes up now, he'll be in a lot of pain." Gabe was almost crying; the thought of this boy going through anymore pain hurt him terribly.

The little boy giggled slightly, and reached out to put a hand on the sleeping boy's head. "Don't worry about it; when I am done, he won't be in any physical pain... the rest, however, is up to you." The boy held Gabe's eyes as his small hand finally touched the badly burned but bandaged forehead.

Gabe watched in awe as a bright light built from where the boy was touching Aalim's forehead. Slowly it spread out from the top of his body, and grew in intensity, until it was completely covering the young twelve-year-old boy. Gabe wanted to look away, to shield his eyes from the bright light, but he simply could not look away as the light seemed to burn the bandages away from the boy, and beneath he saw the badly burned skin. He watched in horrified fascination as slowly the burned skin fell away and was replaced by perfectly smooth bronze-colored, healthy skin.

In some places, Gabe could actually see where all the skin and tissue had been burned away and only bone was showing. That too slowly started to heal, and fresh muscle and skin grew in and replaced the badly burned areas. Time seemed to stop as Gabe stared in awe. Slowly, ever so slowly, the boy, who had been burned to near death, was being put back together by this strange little boy.

As the light started to fade, Gabe got a good look, for the first time, at the boy he'd been sitting with for the last few days, and the sight took his breath away... there was no other way around it: Aalim was beautiful.

He was forced to look away and blush deeply when he heard the little boy giggle as he pulled a fresh sheet out and covered Aalim. He turned his back and walked a few feet away to try and make it so the little boy didn't see how badly he was blushing, but quickly spun when he heard a new voice speak softly. "Where... where am I?"

Quietly the little boy started to speak to Aalim in a language that Gabe did not understand. The purple-eyed boy's voice was soft and soothing as he spoke... while Gabe couldn't understand what was said, he

could tell by the look in Aalim's face that he knew exactly what the boy was saying, and as tears started to form in his eyes, Gabe knew it had to be something good.

For a few minutes, the two had a conversation in the language that Gabe couldn't understand, so he just stood there waiting. A few times, they both looked at him, and the last time, Aalim gave him a brilliant smile, then turned back to the young boy and spoke again, this time in English. "Thank you... thank you so much." He didn't seem to have any type of accent, which slightly surprised Gabe, his voice was like soothing music to Gabe's ears, and it was then that Gabe finally admitted to himself that he had somehow fallen in love with someone he had never even really met.

He was lost in his own thoughts, but was brought back as the young boy leaned in and kissed Aalim on the cheek, and spoke so softly that Gabe couldn't hear what was said. Aalim heard him though, and quickly burst into tears as he grabbed the young boy and hugged him tightly. When he was released, the boy walked over to Gabe and spread his arms, asking for a hug. Gabe was more than happy to give it to him, and when he bent down and embraced the kid, he heard him softly whisper into his ear. "Show him, and yourself, what love really means. Both of you are filled with pain, yet buried beneath that pain is love greater than many will ever know. Let it blossom and forget about what others might have said about it. The Creator doesn't care who you love."

Instantly tears sprang to Gabe's eyes; that was the one thing he worried about the most. The boy broke the hug, and without another word walked from the room. Silently both boys watched him leave, and when the door finally shut, Gabe looked back at Aalim, only to see the same tears that were streaming down his own face were streaming down Aalim's. The only difference is that Aalim was repeating something over and over. Gabe was almost worried until he heard exactly what Aalim was saying. "He loves me... He really loves me..."

Gabe didn't need to ask what Aalim was talking about; he felt the same way. All his life, people had told him that God hated gays... heck, from what he was told, God hated anyone who wasn't just like his parents, and the preacher of their church. Since he was eleven, he had known he was different, and every Sunday he died a little bit inside as he heard his preacher talk about the sins of homosexuals, and how they were all condemned to a life of fire and brimstone in Hell. In many ways, the ONLY thing he learned from his church was hate... and for a very long time, the person he hated the most was himself.

He had resigned himself to dealing with it until he was eighteen and could move out of his house, but his parents found out about his darkest secret. His father tried to "beat the demon" out of him, but all that did was put him in the hospital for nearly two months, and give him a left arm that was nearly useless.

He walked over towards the bed where Aalim sat still silently crying. And before he knew it, he was standing right next to the head of the bed, and Aalim's eyes finally met Gabe's. For the second time in the last few minutes, time seemed to stop as both boys were lost in each other's eyes. Finally Gabe slowly bent down as Aalim reached up, and they both crushed the other in a tearful hug, both shedding cleansing tears as they tried to wash away the pain of the past.

After the boys cried themselves out, Gabe used his only working arm to pull over a chair, and sat very close to Aalim's bed. Aalim reached his hand out, and took Gabe's and for a few moments; they sat there in silence searching the other's eyes, both of them hoping to find something, and find it they did... love.

"I heard you..." Aalim spoke softly. "I heard everything you said as I slept..."

For a brief moment, panic washed through the barely teen-aged boy. Momma Janet had told Gabe that the only thing he could really do is talk to Aalim, as talk he did. For the last two days, Gabe poured his heart out to the boy he loved, but thought couldn't hear him. All the years of self-loathing, and constant drilling in his head about how loving another boy was wrong, made him want to pull away... but Aalim wouldn't let him.

"No!" Aalim said in a soft but firm voice. "I will not let them win. They tried to tell us that the love we want to share is wrong... and I will no longer allow them to rule me... or my heart." Gabe stopped trying to pull his hand away, and gave Aalim's a small squeeze. He still could not bring himself to say anything, but that was fine, as Aalim had something he wanted to say.

"I heard what you said to me, and like you, I had been taught that love like ours is wrong. But as the angel boy said, Allah loves me as he made me, and he loves you as he made you. Never again shall I allow hatred to rule my thoughts. The little angel boy said that there can never be anything wrong with love."

Neither boy stopped crying as Aalim made his proclamation, and as soon as he was done, they both fell into another hug. They held the hug for a few moments, until the silence of the room was broken by a deep rumbling voice. "I am glad to hear you say that." Gabe flew away from Aalim and spun to face the voice. He was crouched slightly as he looked at the huge Cat boy that was standing there. He glanced at the door, trying to decide if he could make it before he was attacked, but the Cat boy quickly held up his hands, palm open and facing Gabe. "Please... I am not here to hurt you, but to try and help. Both of you have been wounded deeply by your past, and The Father has empowered me to help"

Gabe couldn't help himself; with tears of fury running down his face, he stood up straight and spoke in a quavering voice. "God doesn't love me anymore... he... he abandoned me." Even in his heart he knew his words were wrong, but his mind kept trying to blame God for things.

"Yes, He does love you..." the cat boy sighed out quietly.

"Who are you?" Aalim asked from the bed.

"My name is Kuan Ti, and this base holds my family. Tomorrow will be the one week anniversary of my death, yet also the anniversary of my re-birth." He moved his gaze from Aalim, to meet Gabe's eyes again. "Gabriel... I know the pain you feel inside, and so does our Father."

Gabe tried to fight back the tears, but couldn't. "God doesn't love me anymore..."

Kuan Ti cut him off before he could say anything else. "God has never left you, Gabe... NEVER. Think back for a moment... think back to your bedroom... before that night." Kuan Ti's deep rumbling voice seemed to soothe Gabe enough, and he did as asked. He thought back and saw his room. It wasn't very big, but it was his room in every way. "You had a picture hanging over your bed, given to you by your grandmother just before she died. Do you see it?"

Gabe couldn't help but nod slowly. Tears were now streaming down his face. One part of his mind thought that he shouldn't have any tears left, but somehow he managed to find more. "What did it say?"

For a moment, Gabe couldn't find his voice through his tears, but he finally managed to speak in a horse whisper. "Foot... Footprints in the Sand..."

Gabe's voice failed him, but Kuan Ti's voice filled in for him.

**One night I had a dream--
I dreamed I was walking along the beach with the Lord
and across the sky flashed scenes from my life.
For each scene I noticed two sets of footprints,
one belonged to me and the other to the Lord.**

Softly at first, by with growing strength, Gabe joined Kuan Ti as they repeated the poem that Gabe cherished.

**When the last scene of my life flashed before me,
I looked back at the footprints in the sand.
I noticed that many times along the path of my life,
there was only one set of footprints.
I also noticed that it happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in my life.
This really bothered me and I questioned the Lord about it.**

Gabe had been staring at the floor, but his eyes rose and met Kuan Ti's as they continued to speak in unison.

**"Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you,
you would walk with me all the way,
but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life
there is only one set of footprints.
"I don't understand why in times when I needed you most,
you should leave me."**

Kuan Ti's voice was soft as he smiled at the two boys. Gabe reached out with his good arm, and took Aalim's hand as he too smiled while finishing his favorite story.

**The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child,
I love you and I would never, never leave you
during your times of trial and suffering.
"When you saw only one set of footprints,
it was then that I carried you."**

Gabe fell back into the chair, as if someone had cut his strings. He wasn't crying anymore, but had a small smile on his face. "I... I can feel Him... I can feel His love."

Kuan Ti came over and squatted in front of the boy, and spoke in the same soft tone he had been using the entire time. "Of course he does. He loves all of His children."

From the bed came Aalim's voice, who had been watching everything. "Even those who aren't of Gabe's religion?"

Kuan Ti stood up and looked at the boy on the bed with a smile. "He loves all his children, no matter what faith they are a part of. He has many names, and each of them are just as valid. He made you the way you are, and He doesn't make mistakes. He IS love, and as long as you have love in your heart, you are making him happy... nothing else matters."

Neither of the boys knew what to say, so Kuan Ti sat down on the edge of the bed. "May I tell you a story?" Both boys nodded, and Kuan Ti took a huge deep breath, then let it out slowly.

"As I said, I died less than a week ago. I was confused. See, I grew up in a lab, and never knew anything about religion, other than that it was the cause of many wars. I kept my silence, until I could no longer, and I finally sought out the first 'person' I met... Saint Peter. When I found him, I asked to speak to him, and of course, he agreed."

****Flashback****

Kuan Ti walked up to the imposing figure, and spoke in as reverent a voice as he could muster. "Saint Peter... I was wondering if I might speak to you when you get a chance?"

"Of course, Kuan Ti, What may I do for you?" the elderly looking man said in a very soothing voice.

"Well... to be honest, Sir, I am a bit confused..." He trailed off, trying to figure out exactly how to say it.

"What is it that confuses you?" Saint Peter asked.

"Well... I guess I am wondering why I'm here... I mean, I didn't even know anything about this or really anything about religion... heck.. I still don't." Kuan Ti stammered.

Saint Peter couldn't help himself as he started to chuckle. When he saw that Kuan Ti had a hurt look on his face, he stopped. "I was not laughing at you child, just at what you meant. You must understand, though, The Father doesn't care if you know about him or not. He likes it when you do, but that is not a requirement. What matters is how you live your life. In your case, you loved your fellows, and ended up making the ultimate sacrifice for them. To the Father, that is worth more than being able to quote from memory every holy text of your world."

"But... but what about all the wars that were started because of religion?" the tiger boy asked. This was something that had really bothered him.

Saint Peter sighed heavily. "Nothing causes our Father more pain than watching people kill other people because they think that is what He wants. He doesn't want anything more than for everyone to love everyone else."

"But what about all the different religions? Surely one of them is right... or at least more right..."

Again Saint Peter sighed. "No, Kuan Ti... no one religion is more important than another. As long as you are loving the Father, He doesn't really care what name you call Him."

"Seriously?!" Kuan Ti asked in amazement.

Saint Peter smiled a knowing smile, and pointed to beyond the gates. "Go through again, and this time, look at all the differences of the people you see in there. It does not matter what religion they were practicing, as long as they had love in their heart; that is all the Father cares about."

****End Flashback****

"..And I did... I went and looked, and I saw people that came from all parts of this world, and many who came from other worlds. The only thing they had in common was that their hearts were full of love. Because if your heart is full of love, there is no place left for hatred. If you learn nothing else in this life, learn that. Love and hatred can not survive together."

He could see that both boys wanted to believe, but weren't there yet. He looked square at Aalim. "There is a legend of your people," Kuan Ti said, "which an English poet used for a poem. May I give you that poem to help you understand?"

Aalim nodded, and Kuan Ti started to speak. After a few short words, Aalim joined in, understanding flooding his face the more he spoke.

Abou Ben Adhem (may his tribe increase!)

Awoke one night from a deep dream of peace,

And saw, within the moonlight in his room,

Making it rich, and like a lily in bloom,

An angel writing in a book of gold:—

Exceeding peace had made Ben Adhem bold,

And to the Presence in the room he said

"What writest thou?"—The vision raised its head,

And with a look made of all sweet accord,

Answered "The names of those who love the Lord."

"And is mine one?" said Abou. "Nay, not so,"

Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,

But cheerly still, and said "I pray thee, then,

Write me as one that loves his fellow men."

The angel wrote, and vanished. The next night

It came again with a great wakening light,

And showed the names whom love of God had blessed,

And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

"So you're saying that organized religion is wrong?" Gabe asked in a quiet voice.

"No... I am not saying that at all. People need a way to look towards the Father, and religion is that way for many. It is not the only way, but it is the one people use the most. What I am saying is that no one religion is more or less right than any other, as long as they worship the Father. He has many faces, and even more names, He can be one, or He can be many, for He has no limitations, He can do as HE wishes. We are His children, and yet all He asks is that we love each other. The Father hates violence... He knows there are times when violence must be done, but He doesn't like it, and those that do violence, just for violence's sake, will not be welcomed in the Father's mansion. Am I making sense?"

Both boys nodded, so Kuan Ti stood back up and opened his arms to both the boys. Gabe stood up out of his chair, and Aalim got out of the bed. Together they moved over, and were wrapped up in the arms of the huge Tiger boy. "There are many here who know The Father's love, and will help you if you ever stumble." He spoke softly, and the next thing they knew, huge wings surrounded them as well, as Kuan Ti spoke in a soothing voice. "Worry not, children, for The Father loves you, and does not condemn your love. Love who you wish, but love.... THAT is Our Father's greatest commandment."

With a flash, Kuan Ti vanished, leaving the two boys there wrapped in each other's arms. Neither of them realized it then, but Gabe's useless left arm was now holding onto Aalim as strongly as his other arm. Love cured what hatred broke.