

The Nose

My former husband and I liked to entertain. Actually, he liked to entertain and I was a reasonably good hostess. I had learned how to serve people with a smile long ago; while domesticity is not my strong suit, pleasing others is. This party was unique since my mother had just published a very popular essay on the New York Times website. The article dealt with my adoption and our subsequent reunion and her relationship with my daughter. The picture accompanying the piece was my favorite; my mother and I on either side of my daughter, then around four. We are all looking straight into the camera, Taylor with a big grin, smashed in-between her two maternal elders. Without thinking about it consciously, we were protecting her somehow; she had no room to move, no room for anything or anyone bad to infiltrate her.

A friend of mine had heard about the article and wanted to see it. I had meant to send it to her earlier, but like many other times, my good intentions lacked follow-through. I led my friend into the den and found the article. I stood behind her as she read the essay. She nodded her head knowingly throughout, laughing softly and then shaking her head sadly. When she came to the photo she stopped. She said she was always taken by how we three looked so similar. I could never see the similarity. All my life I had longed to look like someone; me, the only 'black' girl in school; me, the only 'colored' girl in my family. While my father had married many times (dragging three kids along with him, myself included) all of his wives were white and their children were theirs, so of course they were white. My brother Daniel was bi-racial like me; he had a much darker complexion because his African American father had chosen a Native American woman, not a Caucasian woman like my father preferred.

I told my friend that I could see the similarity between my daughter and myself, but I thought she looked more like her father. Our similarities, I thought, were much more apparent from the side view, our profiles. She shook her head and pointed out what she thought was the most amazing likeness; it shook me to the core of my being. Just look at your noses, she said to me, they are identical! Surely she was joking. My nose? I hated my nose. From childhood my nose was my worst nightmare. I had visions of it spreading across my face like a gorilla. I invented a daily routine to keep this from happening, putting a close pin on it several times for as long as I could bear it to train it into obedience. My nose, one of the 'black' features that haunted me and kept me alone and different until I was 18 and was able to get out of the completely white surroundings I had always lived in. Maybe we share the same eyes, the same chin; perhaps there is a likeness in our cheekbones, but certainly not in our noses.

My friend stood up and sat me down in the chair in front of the computer. Look at them, she instructed, pointing to each nose one after the other. It was true, amazingly and beautifully true. They were identical; from my mother down to my daughter in the middle and back up to me again. The shape and proportion were identical. I started to cry and laugh and shook and then nodded my head. I took my friend by the hand and held it tightly. She couldn't understand my reaction, but she didn't need to, she only smiled as I continued to stare at the photo.

The nose, the black nose I had dreaded and fought against all of my life, was not black after all.