The question baffles her. What is her father? He is her Dad! He is her Dad and every Sunday morning he makes pancakes for the whole family and lets Carole pour hot syrup on them and afterwards he sits her on his lap and tells stories.

Mrs. Norton leans towards Carole. “Say you had a colouring book. What colour would you make your Dad?”

“I never use just one colour.”

“Okay. What colour would you make his face?”

“Brown.”

“And your mother?”

Carole imagines a blank page. What would she put in her mother’s face? She has to put something in there. She can’t just leave it blank. “I don’t know.”

“Sure you do,” Mrs. Norton says. “How would you colour your mother’s face?”

“Yellow.”

Carole sees Mr. and Mrs. Norton look at each other.


“No.”

“Are you sure you’d colour her yellow?”

“No.”

“What else might you colour her?”


“Red! You can’t colour a face red! Is your mother white? Is she like me? Her face! Is it the same colour as mine?”

“Yes.”

“And your father’s brown?”

Carole nods.

“When you say brown, do you mean he is a Negro?”

“Yes.” Of course her father is a Negro. If Mrs. Norton wanted to know all along if her Dad was a Negro, why didn’t she just ask?

“So you’re mixed?” Mrs. Norton says. “You’re a mulatto!”

Carole’s lip quivers. What is mulatto? Why do they keep asking her what she is? She isn’t anything!

“So is that it? You’re a mulatto? You know what a mulatto is, don’t you? Haven’t your parents taught you that word?”

Approaching with a cart of juice, the stewardess looks up and smiles at Carole. That gives her a rush of courage.

“Leave me alone!” she screams at Mrs. Norton.


“Why do you keep asking me if my Dad is Negro? Yes, he’s a Negro! Okay? OKAY? Negro Negro Negro!”

“Calm down,” Mrs. Norton says, reaching over.

“Don’t touch her,” the stewardess says.

“Who are these people?” someone says from across the aisle.

“Imagine, talking to a child like that, and in 1970!”

One woman sitting in front of Carole stands up and turns around.

“Would you like to come and sit with me, little girl?”

“No!” Carole shouts. “I don’t like all these questions. She keeps asking me how I would colour my parents in a colouring book! Why do you keep asking me that?”

Mrs. Norton pleads with Carole to stop.

“How would you like it if that happened to you?” Carole says.

“So what are you, anyway? What are your parents? How would you colour them? Well, I don’t care! I don’t even care!”

“How would you like to come and sit with me?” the stewardess says, smiling. “I’ll make you a special drink. Have you ever had a Shirley Temple?”

Carole nods enthusiastically. Already she feels better. Clutching Amy, she passes by the Nortons, who swing their legs to let her out.

“My God,” Carole hears Mrs. Norton tell her husband, “talk about sensitive.”

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