Rhakiya’s Eyes

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Rhakiya is ten years old; however, you might presume that she is older. Her eyes have a street-smart worldliness about them. Rhakiya’s eyes are very accomplished at detecting nonverbal communication and body language. Her eyes are highly observant. She’s a beautiful little girl, but she’s stockier and plumper than her classmates are. The other children make fun of her weight and she overcompensates by bullying her classmates. Rhakiya has been known to capture boys, put them in a headlock and punch them in the face repeatedly for making fun of her. When caught in the act, she showed very little remorse. Her eyes were hard and cold like steel, distant and foggy. In fact, after the brawl, she showed no remorse at all. When counseled, her eyes gleamed with an evil pride and twisted accomplishment.

Any other time, Rhakiya’s bright almond eyes are a beautiful hazel color—an exquisite mixture of soft brown, pale green and gray, with stretched and curly lashes. Her complexion is smooth like coffee with cream and when she smiles, her pearly whites could light up a room. She is an absolute beauty. Her eyes tell it all.

You can tell when Rhakiya is dishonest, she looks up and towards the left, as if she is trying to create a new image or scenario in her head. Most people, when they lie, find it difficult to look you in the eye, but not Rhakiya! This young lady will not only look you straight in the eye, but does this with extreme defiance. She is an expert liar and will eventually be able to control her actions to prevent detection. When Rhakiya tries to get away with something, she has devilish playful teasing eyes. Rhakiya has a great sense of humor. When she giggles, her eyes sparkle. She receives pleasure from pointing out the mistakes of others; when she thinks she is right, her eyes are superior, cocky slits.

After a succession of several small fights that culminated into one large violent fight, Rhakiya was ordered to attend anger management counseling, in order to avoid expulsion. In addition to the bullying issues, she was also struggling with the fact that her biological father was sentenced to 20 years in prison. She missed him terribly and that weariness showed in her eyes. Other students were aware of that pain and pushed her buttons to retaliate.

After several months of therapy, Rhakiya’s eyes changed. When her eyes were proud, it was because she had done something good (not evil). It was because she was genuinely and rightfully proud about a particular achievement. She lost a bit of her overzealous and righteous attitude. She listened to others; showed empathy and delighted others with her kind, caring eyes. It was astounding that in only 3 months, Rhakiya’s self-esteem had blossomed. She no longer needed to make other students feel small and insignificant in order to feel good about herself. This was an amazing transformation. She stayed out of trouble and seemed openly pleased with her new self. Rhakiya was always a very intelligent student.
nevertheless her grades were improving. Rhakiya’s spherical windows to her soul, showed happiness, goodness, and a sweetness that was contagious. It seemed that life was positive once more for Rhakiya.

The last time I saw Rhakiya’s eyes haunts me even now. The day before, the school was under a code orange lockdown, which meant that there was a possible threat in the building and all students must remain in their classrooms until an all clear sounded. The lockdown was issued because an irate employee, the janitor, cussed and engaged in altercations with his boss and coworkers in the presence of numerous children. He made a scene—a tumultuous scene and there was no stopping or placating him. He then phoned his wife and brother-in-law to come assist him in the argument. The situation that led to this erratic behavior was that the employee was simply instructed to keep to an updated schedule of daily tasks. Apparently, this command set him off and his unpredictable and vengeful behavior along with his wife’s and brother-in-law, merited the attention of the police, which kept the students on lockdown for over 90 minutes.

The janitor just happened to be Rhakiya’s stepfather, his wife, is her mother. While Rhakiya did not personally see what was happening, other students had. News of the event spread to Rhakiya quickly and students began to taunt her. I could see worry in Rhakiya’s eyes. However, this was the new and improved Rhakiya; the rumors were not going to get her down. Her eyes were rather matter of fact, with a touch of curiosity. You could see that she wanted to remain positive. The old Rhakiya would have lost control and pulverized the kid who delivered the news to her.

It would be the next afternoon when I would see Rhakiya’s eyes for the last time. This time with parents in tow, at school to pick up her belongings, return books and yank her from school. That little girl, stopped by to see me, said not a word, but gave me the tightest hug you can imagine. Her beautiful bright eyes were hurt. There was disbelief and disappointment, hopelessness and shock, confusion and embarrassment. You could see mixed loyalty in her eyes, like she was wise enough to know the situation was wrong, but there was nothing she could do about it, after all, she was a just a kid and these were her parents and caretakers.

It is difficult to forget the eyes I saw that day, in spite of everything, Rhakiya’s eyes trouble me still. I wonder where she is and how her eyes are today. Have her eyes returned to that hard steel defiant state? Or, has she kept on course and become resilient despite her ill-mannered parents? I really want Rhakiya’s eyes to be peaceful and happy, but knowing her family and background, this seems an almost impossible feat for a little girl to achieve without support. I am sure by now; the parents have stopped seeing the value of her therapy and no longer send her. But I hope not. I pray not. If I get my wish, I will see Rhakiya’s eyes again. In 20 years, in those magnificent eyes I wish to see the confidence, happiness, intelligence, survival, strength, success and peace, brought to the forefront, which I could see situated just below the surface of those 10-year-old eyes I remember so well.