

This will not be an ordinary tale. The events of this tale did not happen on an ordinary night. It was an unusual storm that roared in the sky as an ordinary couple raced to the hospital. Jason and Donna Fuller were on the way to deliver a baby. They would soon learn that this ordinary pregnancy on this irregular night would be a strange baby born into this world. But it will be okay,

The mother is rushed to the delivery room. As she lays in her bed, she pushes as her husband cheers her on. Once the baby is in the doctor's hands, the room falls silent. The doctor lost all of her speech. The mother, once she gathers herself, notices the shocked look on every one in the room.

"What's wrong?" she asked, full of worry. "Is my baby okay?"

"You've given birth to a very healthy little girl. She's okay, but..."

"But what?"

"She's just..." the doctor falls silent as she gives the bundle to one of the nurses and he rushes out of the room.

"Where's my baby?" the father asks.

"The baby is okay. We're just doing some tests. She is healthy. Your baby is okay."

The baby is taken and the doctors do every test that they can. Frantic, they call all around the world. No one has an answer. Everyone is confused. Every test came back saying that the baby is okay, except for one itty, bitty thing.

The baby is brought back, bundled just as tightly and securely as she was when she was spirited away. The mother holds the baby close to her chest. The father leans in anxiously. They unwrap the blanket and look into the face of their bundle of joy for the first time.

"Our baby is gray." they say in unison to each other.

"Yes!" the doctor exclaims. "But your baby is okay. That's the most important thing. We did every test. Called in every expert. We can't find anything wrong. She may be gray, but she is okay."

The parents smile at their little bundle and hold her close. The father looks lovingly at his wife. "She's alive. She's got all her fingers and toes. She's just a little gray, but that's okay."

"Carol Fuller." the mother whispers to the baby. "Hi. It's okay that you're gray. That's okay. You're still the music to our lives."

The young happy couple took their joy home. Their parents came over as soon as they arrived. The proud grandparents looked at Carol and their jaws dropped.

"Hey, son. Did you know that our grandbaby is a... little gray?" The husband's father asked.

"Is she okay?" the wife's mother asked.

"I know you're concerned, but we're well aware that she's gray." the young father responds.

"And, yes, she's okay." the young mother adds. Once the grandparents were firmly assured that even though little Carol was gray, that she is okay, they relax. They fall in love with her, as all grandparents do.

A precocious baby, energetic, quick with a smile, and a laugh that captures hearts and never lets go. As she grew, so did her curiosity. Ah, her curiosity. Something to behold. It also led to a bit of a mischievous streak that caused her parents quite a few heart palpitations. She kept them on their toes. When she learned to walk, she wandered more and more. Watching her became a necessity.

When they were out and about, she always drew all kinds of looks and questions from strangers. It was quite plentiful, and little Carol enjoyed the attention.

"Is she okay?"

"Why is she gray?"

"Will she make my child gray?"

"Will she be okay?"

The parents always answered questions with grace and patience.

"Yes, she was born gray. And healthy. So, yes, she's gray, but she's okay." They would always say with a smile.

Her curious nature and smile made her a joy to a lot of people, and she got along great with the other toddlers. Until...

Until one parent refused to allow his child to play with Carol.

"That child is gray! That is not okay!"

Soon, some other parents followed suit. Little Carol did not understand and this broke her parents' hearts. For the first time, Carol was aware that she is gray. She was alone. She was not okay.

Her parents feared what would happen to her, so Carol's mother used her makeup to give Carol color. To look "normal". Carol didn't like it at first. She didn't understand. "Why can't i just be gray?" she would ask. "Why isn't that okay?" They tried their best to explain, but could never get the words right. They just let her know that she is so special, that some people wouldn't understand it.

They also moved her to another school to have a chance at a "normal" childhood. While she rebelled at first, making new friends at preschool changed her mind. All of her doubts melted away. Her parents' worries faded. She was not gray, but at least she was okay.

This continued. Every morning, her mother would wake her up early to do her makeup. It was a chore, but her mother made it fun. But with every solution, a new problem arises. She couldn't go out into the rain unless she was fully covered. She could go to the pool with her friends, but she couldn't swim, at least not around them. The parents had already prepared excuses as to why; then Carol learned to make them on her own. Eventually, everyone accepted it and moved on.

Carol was no longer gray, but was she okay?

Carol accepted her new life, but as she turned 7, she began to feel bad that she couldn't be herself. "After all, no one else had to hide. No one else had parents that worried constantly!" she would think to herself. Her parents warned her that the children may not understand her and think that they can "catch the gray". She knew that now. She knew that, in order to fit in, she had to wear make up. She had to avoid the rain. And she couldn't swim. She wasn't gray, she also wasn't okay.

One day, Carol saw a familiar face in class. It was Brenda from her old neighborhood. A chill went down her spine as she recalled all of the taunting that she received from people. Even so, Carol decided to try to remain calm. She would not give in to fear.

She tried to be brave, but she shrunk into herself. She played by herself at recess. She wasn't quite feeling like herself. Brenda walks over with a grin.

"Well, if it isn't Little Miss Storm Cloud?" she taunted. "Do you think that you can fit in now that you're covered in makeup?" Brenda turns to the rest of the class. "Hey, everyone! Little Miss Storm Cloud isn't who she's pretending to be!"

"Please stop." Carol pleaded. Brenda smirks. "For now." she giggles mischievously as she skips away. Troubled by this all day, when home, she asks her parents at dinner, "Do you ever think it

will be okay for me to be gray?" Her father looks at her with a smile. "One day, Butterfly, this world will finally see you for who you are."

Carol dreaded going to school. She put on a brave face at home, but inside, she was twisted in knots. Every time she had a free moment, Brenda would taunt her. Carol found no peace in her friend Darnell. He always tried to make her smile. He could not figure out where Carol's smile went. She would never tell him. Carol feared how he would react if he found out her secret. Any moment, any day, Brenda could reveal who she really was. She was still gray. And that wasn't okay.

One day at recess, storm clouds began to form. "Your family's here to pick you up!" Brenda teases. Darnell finally stands up for her. Brenda laughs impishly. "You won't be her friend for long!" she mused wickedly. She walks back to her friends, who proceeded to make faces at them.

"Don't worry about them." Darnell says gently. "They're just jealous. Mama always said that people are only mean because they're jealous!" Carol nods sheepishly. She so badly wanted to tell Darnell. To just get it over with.

"Darnell, I... I"

The first drop of rain lands on her hand. She quickly put it behind her back.

"Carol, what's wrong?" Darnell asks. Before she could respond, the teacher stands up. "Alright everyone! It's time to go back inside! Please enter in an orderly fashion."

The children file back into the school. Brenda held the door open as everyone went inside. Just as Darnell and Carol reached the door, she slammed it shut. Her act of altruism was just a ruse. The rain began to pour.

"Please! Let me in!" Carol pleads loudly. Brenda just smiles cruelly.

"C'mon everyone!" she shouts. "See! Little Miss Storm Cloud is a fraud!" The students come to the door and gawk at Carol as the rain causes streaks in the make up that her mother carefully applied.

"See! She's gray! She's always been gray! And that's not okay!" Brenda jeers. Some of the children began to mock her. Some shouted "Eww!" Darnell offers her his jacket, but it was too late. She refused it. One thing she was thankful for was no one could tell her tears from the rain drops.

"Enough!" one of the teachers shouts. "That's enough! Everyone get to class now!" The teacher grabs Brenda by her shoulder. "Your parents will hear of this!" The teacher opens the door. Her

sorrowful face falls upon Carol. "Are you okay, honey?" Carol nods, pretending to be brave. "I'll have someone bring you a towel, but I need you two to get to class."

"C'mon, Carol." Darnell says. "I'll protect you."

"Your parents will hear of this." The teacher tells Brenda. "We're going to the principal's office."

"But she's gray! She's the freak! Why am I getting punished?" Brenda protests as she's led to the office.

Throughout the day, Darnell was true to his word. He refused to let any student near her. She could still hear the stifled giggles of her classmates. When Carol went home, her parents were upset that she came home without her make up. Her parents questioned her, but she remained silent. She even refused to eat dinner. Her parents were not ignorant of what happened, as the school called them at work. The next morning, as she received her daily make up, Carol was sullen. Her mother touched her cheek. "Whenever you're ready to talk to me about what happened, let me know." she said with a smile. "But we'll be taking you to school in the morning. We have to meet with the principal."

Both sets of parents sit in the principal's office. Brenda remains defiant while Carol slinks into her seat.

"Why did you do this to our daughter?" Donna demands.

"Because she's a freak! That's why!" Brenda rebukes.

"How dare you speak to my daughter like that?!" Brenda's father roars.

Jason scowls. "You don't talk to my wife like that!" He roars back.

"Everyone! Settle down! Is this the example you want to set for your children?" Principal Leary responds. She then turns to Brenda. "You apologize to Carol."

"Why do I have to? She's the..."

"Apologize now or apologize when you come back from your suspension, but you will not set foot in this school unless you do."

"That's not fair!" Brenda protests.

"Neither is what you did to Carol." Principal Leary turns to Carol and her parents. "Please accept my apology. We will keep an eye on her from here on out."

"Thank you." Donna responds. After signing paperwork, everyone left the office except for Carol. "I'll walk you to your class." Principal Leary offers.

Throughout the day, Darnell did the same thing, but they still teased her.

"She's so gray." one whispers mockingly.

"I wouldn't even come to school if I were gray." whispers another.

"Being gray is not okay." whispers one more.

At lunch, Carol even avoided Darnell as she sat by herself. Darnell sits down anyway. She looks away.

"Hey." he says.

"Hey." she says back flatly.

"Are you okay?"

"Hey Darnell!" one student shouts across the cafeteria. Are you really gonna sit with the Storm Cloud? Aren't you scared that you'll catch 'the gray'?" Darnell waves them off. He turns to her, "You don't have to talk to me, but I'll be here if you need me." he says with the cheesiest smile he could muster. He continued to walk by her side every day.

When Carol gets home, Jason has cooked all of her favorite meals. "Hey, baby girl! Welcome home!" He says with everything he could muster.

"Hey." She says back. "I'm going to my room."

"Okay." he says. "You can always talk me, you know that, right?"

"I know, Dad. I love you."

"I love you too, Butterfly."

Carol goes to her room and cries. Why does she have to be gray? Why doesn't she get to be okay? She wonders to herself. After she's done crying, her dad comes to her room and hugs her. She falls asleep in his arms.

The next morning, Donna wakes her up for her morning routine. As Donna starts the makeup, Carol stops her.

"Why'd you stop, baby?"

"I don't want to do this anymore! Why can't I be okay?" Carol cries. Donna's heart breaks into a million pieces. She doesn't know how to give her daughter the words she needs to her. Donna tries her hardest not to cry. "Well, Butterfly, the world... maybe one day the world will be okay with you being gray. I know your life will be hard until then, and Butterfly, I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that I failed you." Donna says as she fights tears. Carol wipes away a few of Donna's tears. She smiles.

"I think the problem...I don't think the world will ever be ready for me. I'll never be enough for the world. I'll just have to be enough for me." Carol says. Donna holds her tightly. "You're so smart!" Donna gushes. She lets Carol go and puts her hands on her shoulders. "You're the strongest little girl I know! Okay! We're gonna get rid of the makeup and we're gonna be enough for ourselves!" Carol gives her mom a kiss on the cheek and goes to her room to put her clothes on.

When Carol gets to school, she walks with her head held high. The whispers came quickly. They still stung, but she decided to keep going. As she walks the pathway into the school, Darnell finds her and walks beside her.

"What are you doin'?" he pleads. "Why are you gray?"

"Because I *am* gray. And it doesn't have to be okay with no one but me!" She struts away. She stops at the entrance to the school and turns to Darnell. "You comin' or what?"

Carol makes it through the day, not unscathed, but she's okay. The next day is the same thing, but she keeps her head held high. Her parents made sure that she knew that she was enough.

Then the next day turns into the next. The whispers were still there, but there weren't as many. Carol had accepted that she was gray. That she had great parents. That she had a friend she could depend on. For the first time in a while, she was truly okay.

The next day, the coach came to school and he was pink! He thanks Carol for giving him the strength to be himself. Another teacher comes in and she's burgundy. Darnell comes the next day and he's blue. While there weren't many of them there, just a little gray gave them the strength to know that they didn't have to be enough for the world, they just had to be enough for themselves.

Carol is gray. And she is okay.