

The Dark Skinned SISTER



AMANDA GRIHM

The

Dark Skinned Sister

Sample Chapters

Chapters One & Two

CHAPTER ONE

Before my Grandpa George died, Grandma Mindy and I really did not get along all that well. I was darker than my sisters, brothers, cousins, aunts and uncles. I think it bothered her to have a child, dark like me, in her family. I could never explain that to m'self b'cuz Grandma Mindy was a whole lot darker than me. I guess b'cuz she married a light-skinned man, she felt a little less dark...and sometimes, a lot less dark.

I remember the last day I spent with my Grandpa George. My brother, sister, mom and I were on the Number 5 bus...on our way to his farm when I spotted him. I was so excited

I could barely speak. My little sister, Cindy, was sitting next to me acting like a perfect little angel – being quiet and cute. She had a sweet look on her face and every now and then, she would lean over, place her hand against my ear and act as if she was whispering to me. I could feel her hot little breath blowing in my ear but I did not hear a word she said.

Without knowing what was said, I could hear bits and pieces of a serious conversation between Joseph and Maumee – that's what we call our mother -- Maumee.

“You don't have to go. Really, we will find a way.” I heard her say.

“Really, really because...” I could not hear the rest of what Joseph was saying.

I was playing a game in my head, looking out the side of my eye when I caught a glimpse of Grandpa George's shiny brown truck. I just about choked on my excitement. “Grandpa

George, Oh my goodness, its Grandpa George," I screeched out. I was so excited I could not contain m'self.

Cindy was stepping in my lap by that time, trying to look out the window to see Grandpa George. She was little for her age but those hard-bottomed shoes hurt like the dickens. Suddenly, my joy was cut short by the startling, screeching, high-pitched scream that Cindy let out. "Eeeeeeeeeee Gampa George." She had caught a glimpse of him and couldn't contain herself either. Her screech made everybody on the bus turn and look at us. I could see the disdain in some of those twisted up noses and wrinkled eyebrows.

"Mindy," Joseph said in an embarrassed, accusing, low voice.

"What I do?" I asked.

The next thing I knew Joseph was standing in front of me patting his foot as though it was my fault that Cindy had screamed!

“Mindy, when you are watching Cindy, you have to keep her under control. You can’t let her scream out like that on a bus. Do you hear what I’m say’n?”

“Yes, but...” I whispered in a very excited tone, “Grandpa George is here, Joseph. Look, he’s right there!” I jumped from my seat, grabbed Joseph’s face, and kissed him on the cheek. “He’s right outside.”

Joseph tried to be firm but when he caught a glimpse of Grandpa George it was hard for him to hide his excitement, too. He shook his head in agreement. “I know, Mindy, I know.” He shook his head back and forth, “Boy, I love being around Grandpa George.”

“Meeeeee too!”

Cindy was dancing in the aisle by this time. Joseph picked me up and said, “We gonna have some fuuuunnn!”

Cindy screeched again. The bus driver hit the brakes and shouted for us to hurry up and get off the bus. I looked at Cindy

mystified that she would do that again, knowing that I would get in trouble. Then I thought, *what the heck! I feel like screeching, too*. I looked at Joseph and he just smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

All of a sudden Joseph got very serious. His face looked troubled. He turned to Maumee and said, "Can't I skip this one summer? Coach said that I am so good I can probably make Varsity this year." Before she had a chance to answer, he dropped his head and said, "Never mind, I know how bad we need the money."

Maumee had tears in her eyes. "You don't have to go. We'll find a way."

Joseph had tears in his eyes, too. "Forget it. We need the money and I'm the only one who can handle the work. I can always play football next year. I'll be alright."

I could see the sadness all over his face and his shoulders began slumping in slow motion when he said, "I'm the man in this family. I'll do what I hafta do."

I hollered out, "You ain't no man - you a teenager – you just a boy!"

A tear dropped from his eye as he packed our coloring book and grabbed our suitcase. He touched my shoulder and I grabbed Cindy's hand.

In her little-tiny baby voice, Cindy said, "Gampa George is outside, Mindy. It's Gampa George. We hav'n fun already, huh?"

Cindy was so excited that she was trying to run off the bus. Now if there is one thing that we did not do, it is run off a bus. I had to pull her back so that she could give Maumee her goodbye hug and kiss. After we said our goodbye's to Maumee, Joseph tapped my shoulder again and Cindy and I walked...in an orderly fashion...to the front door of the bus.

"Y'all be good. Listen to yo' Grandpa George and Grandma Mindy. I love y'all. I miss you already." Maumee was shouting from the back of the bus.

People were turning around looking at her with aggravated, impatient frowns.

"Whatcha look'n at? My kids are leaving me for the whole summer. I'm gonna let them know that I love 'em and that I'm gonna miss 'em, so just turn yo' selves back around cuz' this is my business – not yours," Maumee said with a sassy snap as she stretched her back long and straight and turned her head to the side.

I had stopped, turned around and looked at my mother with a proud but sheepish grin. I had never heard Maumee act that feisty. When Joseph tapped my shoulder I was reminded that I needed to be moving off the bus in an orderly fashion...not egging my mother on to speak so sharply to the other passengers on the bus. I moved toward the front of the bus, but I had an

extra pep in my step after hearing my mother take care of those wrinkle-nosed passengers.

The bus driver was more aggravated because he must have felt that we were taking too long to get off his bus. He seemed to be very agitated with Maumee. "Ma'am. Either have a seat and you be quiet; or, you get off the bus wit' yo' kids."

Joseph was right about next to the bus driver when he said what he said to Maumee. Joseph stooped to eye level with the bus driver. I watched him with unabashed excitement.

As soon as he opened his mouth to speak Maumee said, "Go 'on baby. The man is right. We are slowing him down. I love you and I'll see you soon. Try to enjoy yo 'self."

CHAPTER TWO

Grandpa George was standing in front of the open door waiting for us to jump off the bus and into his arms. First, Cindy would jump and then me. Grandpa George was as strong as an Ox, at least that's what he always told us. Joseph stopped at the last step. Then he grabbed our bags and placed them on the ground next to Grandpa George. When all the bags were on the ground Joseph hugged Grandpa George just as hard as Cindy and I did. He always tried to act like such a strong man, but the moment he saw Grandpa George, he turned right back into that happy little boy excited to see his Granddad.

As the bus pulled off we could see Maumee standing on her knees on the back seat waving and blowing kisses to us. Cindy always burst out in tears and screams. She would be reaching towards the bus at Maumee. She was four years old - almost five - and the same thing happened every year when we stayed with Grandpa George and Grandma Mindy. This was Cindy's

second year so she should have known what was about to happen. Joseph had to hold her all the way to the farm to keep her quiet. By the time we reached the farm I had to choke back some tears because I was missing Maumee, too. However, the instant I saw the horses, my mind started singing the giddy up song and my tears dried up.

We passed the stable and the barn and down the way I could see the farmhouse coming into view. I wanted to jump out of the car and go horseback riding but I knew I had to go to the house to see Grandma Mindy first. Grandma Mindy was standing on the porch like a sculpted glass figurine. Her little body was standing as straight as an arrow and her hands were folded in front of her covered in white lace gloves. At first glance you would think you were looking at a statute or a poster; she was so rigid and picture-like. Her posture was always perfect because she wanted to present a good look whenever anybody saw her. She always dressed as if she was about to be

photographed. Every year, she stood in that same spot waiting for us to run up to hug her, even though most of the time she acted like she didn't like it. Grandma Mindy was dressed up in a pretty, frilly, yellow and white dress. She had powder on her face, her eyes were outlined with thick black liner, her eye lashes where thick and long and her candy-apple red lipstick embellished her lips. Her eyebrows were arched exquisitely and she had beautiful short curly dyed black hair that adorned her face, exactly right.

I always hoped that she would be leaving to go somewhere, anywhere, being that she was all dressed up like that but she never did. She just sat around the house doing little nick-knack stuff, sipping tea, and cross-stitching handkerchiefs. She wore high heel shoes in the house and just about everywhere she went. She wore them so often that I used to wonder if she slept in them. She had pretty legs and I guess

she needed to let everybody know that something about her was naturally pretty.

Grandpa George pulled up in front of the walkway to the porch. "Hello darlings," Grandma Mindy shouted from the porch. She waved like the Queen of England and then resumed her straight posture like one of the guards in front of Buckingham Palace. She was never excited to see us, I mean; she never came off the porch to greet us. She just waited for us to come to her.

Cindy shot out the car, ran up to - and jumped in - Grandma Mindy's arms. "Hi Gamma Mindy, I missed you." Grandma Mindy laughed and blushed while Cindy kissed her all over her face. "You look so pretty, Gamma Mindy."

"Oh, oh, this child. I say, Georgie, this one is becoming more beautiful each year. She's still just as light as a feather and her light skin is so pretty." Grandma Mindy said through a grin so big that it looked like her face should have hurt.

She put Cindy down, kissed her on her forehead, and straightened her clothes. Joseph got out the car slowly, walked up to her and kissed her on her cheek. "Hi Grandma Mindy, I am happy to be here this summer."

Grandma Mindy smiled broadly and said, "I am glad you could come, too, Oh, honey, try to do your chores before the sun comes out. You look like you done been in the sun. That ain't good for you, 'cuz you git'n a little dark." Grandma Mindy looked at me and picked Cindy up again. I was half way up the walk, almost at the steps when I noticed a look of disdain on Grandma Mindy's face. I walked onto the porch and leaned over to kiss her on the cheek but she, quickly, turned and took a step back.

"Weeeeeeeeeee," Cindy said. Grandma Mindy stepped back and turned so quickly that Cindy thought she was giving her a ride.

She settled Cindy in her right arm and brushed off her dress with her left hand. She looked down her nose as she spoke. "My,

my, my, ump, you look'n a little better this year...most times you come here looking like a dirt goblin."

"Hi Grandma Mindy."

"Hello Mindy."

She had hurt my feelings again but this time they weren't hurt as bad as the other times. I was becoming immune to her insults. I closed my eyes and took a long, deep, breath. She ain't even human, she is just like a glass figurine - one push and she'll fall over and break. I opened my eyes but she was still standing there looking at me with an intense look of disapproval.

In my mind I sized her up and could see m'self placing my hand on her shoulder and tipping her perfectly erect body over. I laughed at the thought of her glassy icy facade shattering as it hit the ground. I know it was a mean thought but that's what went through my mind. Grandma Mindy was my height or maybe a fraction of an inch taller and I felt like I could take her if it came to that.

“Ump. You’re getting bigger.”

“Yes, ma’am I am growing up. I’m almost...” she put her hand up in the air for me to stop talking.

“Ump, you are bigger.”

I didn’t know whether to answer or to just stand there. I turned to look at my Grandpa George. “I...” she cut me off again.

“Don’t talk to me wit’ yo’ head turned to someone else, don’t you have no manners at all.”

“I’m happy to be here, Grandma Mindy.” For a minute I thought she was reading my mind because she looked at me with a lot of skepticism. Talking to her was frustrating me and it was those times that I was not happy to be there. Then I remembered...she wasn’t reading my mind... that was just the way she looked at most people that she didn’t care nothing about.

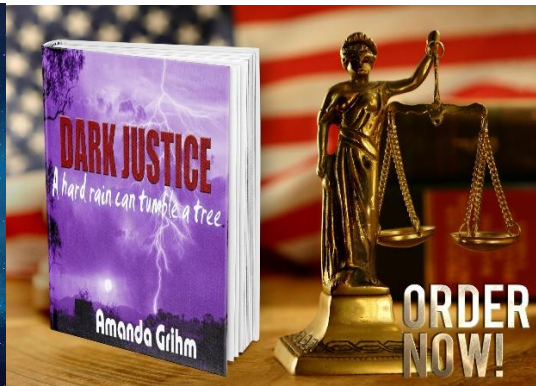
I stepped close to her and leaned in to kiss her again; and again, she stepped back. I stood there for a second longer but she never moved back so that I could greet her with a kiss and that was all right with me. I shrugged my shoulders and skipped off the porch. She had that same twisted look on her face that the people on the bus had on their faces. It was ugly and distasteful.

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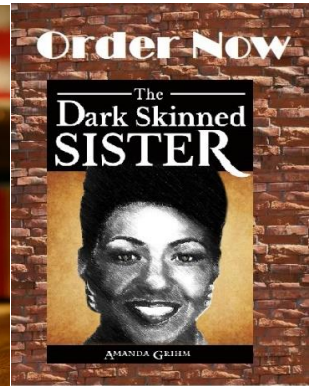
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