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Less Than That... Or More

by Rachel Cousinaw

We could not stop staring. Even the minister had a look of disbelief on his face. No one could believe the sight we were seeing. A woman, a woman new to this town, had just walked hesitantly into the church. No one was with her; she was all alone. As she slowly found her way to a seat, we watched her every move. We all knew right away that she was not one of us. Not that there was anything monstrous about her appearance. She was exactly like us in all respects except for her weight. She seemed to be poorer than us too; her clothes were not of the finest quality. Finally the service started. No one there will ever forget that day.

I live in a small town in Nebraska. There are not many of us and we do not take kindly to newcomers. Everything about us and our town is perfect; it always has been. There is no pollution of the air or water, the streets are clean, the buildings always look new, and there is no violence. The people are all attractive with not a single flaw. We dress well, in only the finest clothing, and we are all perfectly built with a perfect tan. We do not question why; this is just how it has always been. To us this is "normal." There is no such thing as welfare here. We know we are better than those who are not like us, and that is why this newcomer was not accepted.

As you can guess, no one talked to the new lady. She had attempted to introduce herself, but the minister would not acknowledge her. She did get out her name, though. Jane.

Every day it was the same. No one would even look at her. When she went into stores, no one helped her. They continuously overcharged her, and when they took the money, they would look right past her.

I have been saying "they" when it should be "we." I have been doing the same thing. I own the grocery store in our town. It is just a small place, but filled with nothing but the best. My name is Tucker and I am guilty of all of the above, also.

I noticed a difference in Jane after the first week. She seemed more
depressed and she stopped trying to make friends. This made her even more different. We, the people in this town, never have negative feelings like anger, hurt, frustration, or depression. We always have hope. That is another way we are perfect; not only on the outside, but the inside too.

There had been a few times when I might have actually talked to her, but I could not. No one else would. And I understand why; she was different. It is like an unspoken rule in our town that we do not accept individuals that are not as perfect as us. No one ever born in this town had ever been less than perfect. That is just the way it always has been and always will be. Our town is sort of like an exclusive club. Once you are in, you are doing good, but if you screw up, you are out for good.

I am not sure how long it was that Jane stayed with us. It got to where we could easily see through her even as large as she was. If we pretended she was not there, we felt better. She had tried to buy clothes once, but no one had any to fit her. Since all the women here are thin, no one bothered with the bigger sizes.

Now Jane was an intelligent woman. In fact, she was a doctor. She had been sent in to take over for our regular doctor; we had no choice about her coming here. Our regular doctor was out for a few weeks after giving birth; the baby was, of course, perfect.

It was not that Jane had little money; she just chose not to spend it on "the best" of things, while we would settle for no less.

I often saw Jane at the library and instead of the magazines most of our women looked at, she got books. Real books. She read biographies and autobiographies of famous important people, books about important historical events, and novels.

Jane taught me something during her short stay. No one is perfect. We were all perfect, on the outside. But our insides were questionable. Now Jane was so perfect inside. She was nice, sweet, caring, and intelligent.

I still believe that I am perfect. It is something I was raised to believe. But we all have emotions. The people of this town just do a lot of pretending. Jane had been content with being mediocre. In fact she did not think of herself as that. She, unlike us, did not judge others by their appearance.

We all remember Jane, but we pretend not to. I mean, really, our minds have to be perfect too.