



Spotty,
But Perfect

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I dedicate this book to my future child.

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1. My Spot

There is a hidden small spot at a corner in my house. It is in the wooden hallway where the ceiling-high windows stand facing the backyard and the guest room which we rarely use on the other side. The floor gets a lot of warm, bright sunlight through the windows. In winter, the tiny spot becomes my designated hangout. When my preschool is off, I sit there wrapping myself with the yellow blanket I love so much and let hours go by. I read, doodle, and doze off when the warm, endless sunlight gently caresses my body underneath the soft, cotton blanket. It keeps me warm and as comfortable as a baby in a cradle or in its mother's arms. I go there right after breakfast with my family and stay there a whole day until my mom calls me for dinner. On this magical day, I looked outside, and it started snowing. I watched the snow falling, visible through the large windows as I laid myself down on those warm, cozy floors.

2. My Name

My name means manly or reliable in Japanese. Yes, it is supposed to be for boys. I have never met a girl who has a name like mine. My parents had already had two girls when my mother had me in her womb. From the way they named me, it is easy to guess they wished I had been a boy. Alas, it was a girl again! Not caring to know the meaning of my name or the story behind it, I grew up like a boy. Not only did I have short hair like a boy, I always wore a pair of pants like, yeah, you guessed it, a boy. I felt out of place in skirts. I hung out with boys and didn't own girly stuff like things in pink, ribbons, and barbie dolls. I had quite a few instances where I was mistaken for a boy, thanks to my name and look, and that made me embarrassed. Yet the odd thing is it also made me feel like I was a chosen one. Special. As a grown up, I like being different as I did when I was a child. The truth is I'm fond of my name.

3. My Escape

I never felt that I belonged to where I grew up. I was bored because nothing seemed to sparkle my interests. I was lonely because I was close to no one. Since I found out that there were other places you could go, I kept dreaming of living somewhere far, far, across the sea. However, my vague but persistent fantasy didn't keep me away from my busyness, having to deal with the mundane stuff of my daily life. I needed friends because I did not want to be isolated at school. I needed to take care of my miserable father who had just lost his wife. I needed to face my self-consciousness that had just started growing and taking over my inner self.

In those times, I would go to the library alone. The place always welcomed me with numerous books and comfortable silence. I never met anybody I knew while I was there. A sanctuary where I could be myself. Some days I would sit in the travel guide section, and some days I would stay in the photo book section. Choose one, glue to each page I flipped! And I imagined if I were there. That feeling of excitement kept me alive back then. I spent time as long as the time allowed me. When the sun started fading, I would reluctantly lift my heavy butt, walk toward the exit to go home.

4. He Was Just a Hurt Old Man

My father never mentioned my mother. Not once did I see him missing her or putting flowers in front of her memorial photo in the room. He even let us, the girls, meet his new girl friends sometimes. I always resented him for trying to have a new partner in his life. I was never ready to have a new mother even though I was desperate for someone who would love me. I hated my father when he looked like a dirty, flirty man who forgot his wife, my mother.

One night, decades later, my father and I were watching TV shows. We usually do not talk, just staring at the TV screen. Then there was a memorial program for a singer who died 30 years ago.

The screen showed the film of the singer singing when she was well. I knew this singer was my father's favorite. We kept watching, remaining quiet all the while. In the middle of the song, he stood up and disappeared into the kitchen. I could not see him from where I sat, but heard him weeping. Until then, I had always thought that he got over my mother a long time ago. But he hadn't. His heart still needed mending. It was too late for me to realize that he was just an hurt, old man. That was two years before he passed away.

5. Took Long Time

My classmates always seemed ahead of me. They had everything they wanted. I had nothing but naiveness. I was a lone, black duckling in the sea of white swans. They looked happier with life more exciting than mine. So, I wanted to be like them. One day I decided to be a badass because they looked like they had no fear, worry, or loneliness. I thought it would put me ahead of my classmates. I began skipping school, staying away from home, smoking, drinking, piercing, clubbing, stealing, threatening, working illegally—anything I could come up with to be fearless badass.

The conclusion first. I did not turn into a badass. I still do not have things my classmates had. I think I am still naive.

But I have learned what made me happy and what didn't. What was necessary to me and what wasn't. I also have learned how to take care of myself and found the one who loves me. Now I have peace within me. I now realize this was what I really wanted all along when I was a small black, lonely duck.

6. Had No Idea What I Was Thinking

I adored my youngest sister. She was born when I was six. Was soft and puffy like a white marshmallow. I would read a book to her and amuse her with my puppet show. But I do not remember changing her diapers even once, and I played with her only when I was up to it and with the ways I wanted to. My grandma did most of the caring for her. She was a doctor and a super protective and even vigilant parent for my baby sister. My grandma was as hard and tough as a nail. I got scared of her sometimes.

When I turned seven, I got my own bicycle for the first time, and that made me excited. One morning, I had a good idea. If I took my baby sister on my cycling journey, she would be very pleased. We could go to my school just a mile away from home and show her the flower garden, and the best part would be that we could go back before my grandma would notice. It would be so much fun. When grandma was not paying any attention to us, I got her outside and sat her on the rear rack of my bicycle. It was a cold day in winter, so she was wearing a thick romper suit and a diaper under it.

Good, it could be a good protection for her butt. I warned her, “You have to hold my back tight, ok?” Of course, she did not answer. She could not speak yet. I rushed to the front seat and got on. I slowly pushed the pedal, leaving our house yard. Our journey just started! The cold wind slashed on my cheek, and I thought it was going to be a great adventure for me and my baby sister. It did not take even 300 feet when I heard the scream behind us. I looked back. She was there but lying flat on her back in the street. I did not understand what just happened. Was that my sister? Why was she lying there? Why was she not holding onto my back like I told her to? When did she fall off? While I was pondering these questions, she kept screaming. She must have hit the back of her head on the asphalt. Was she okay? Was she bleeding?

But more than anything, I had to stop her scream before it reached grandma’s ear. If she knew about this, she would kill me for sure. I hurried back to my sister and covered her mouth, telling her, “Shh! Shhh! Please stop crying, I’m begging you!” She did not stop. I panicked, and I was exhausted. I sat on the cold wet asphalt and wait, wait, and waited until she stopped crying.