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Slip of Southern Hospitality

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March 24th, 2019

Slip of Southern Hospitality

As I walked towards the restaurant, my legs wobbled with every step. After being crammed in the back seat of a car for six hours next to my nudging little brother and his compelling need to put his stinky feet in my face, the decision to stop for food was perfectly fine with me. I had no idea what state we were in. "Just entered South Carolina," responded my dad after I asked. Before that day I had never stopped in South Carolina. We had only driven through occasionally during one of our rare family trips to Disney World. It was warm. A hazy buzz rang through the summer air. Nothing seemed blatantly out of the ordinary, but a definite feeling of unfamiliarity encompassed the situation.

As my large family of seven walked into the southern style restaurant I noticed out of the corner of my eye a few heads sitting in the booths nearby turn. I thought to myself that they were most likely looking out of surprise. Not every day does one see a tired, sweaty, and overwhelmed family eating at a restaurant that seems to be fancier than what they were prepared for. My mom has a funny rule of making sure when we stop to eat in a state we've never been to, we have to go to a restaurant that serves authentic food to that state. She credits her rule to one time becoming sick after getting "drive through" at a fast food joint during a family road trip. I noticed how the pale-yellow walls of the restaurant seemed freshly painted. The sweet aroma of seafood and biscuits wafted in through the frequently opening kitchen doors. My little sister was fixated on a dessert cart that lazily rolled by, her brown eyes going wide with excitement. "Right this way sir," our hostess directed in a cheerful southern drawl. As we walked towards our table even more people turned our way, much to my confusion. Maybe it was the exhaustion of

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driving for six hours straight or hunger, or a mix of both, that my parents didn't seem to notice the stares.

It wasn't until we ordered our food, did the whispers begin. With the arrival of the first deep sigh and shake of their heads from the couple sitting closest to us, my parents began to realize the situation arising. "Am I hearing what I think I am hearing?" my mother questioned. My dad leaned forward to get a better sense of what the couple was saying. Our worries were confirmed as the woman glanced over at my little sister, Sydney, flashed a pitiful smile, and then turned to glare at my mother once more. My pale hand reached for my little sister's dark brown one. I squeezed it lovingly in a way to somehow validate the relationship the couple was so openly judging. Sydney joined our family through adoption. She is one hundred percent Jamaican. In New Jersey, where my family lives, no one seemed to ever have a problem with our family dynamic. That was until we arrived at the upscale South Carolinian restaurant.

All of our worried eyes peered around the table, praying that Sydney would not pick up on the comments being made so close by. Luckily, very good food was brought out soon after and served as a good distraction. Steam curled up from mashed potatoes and the heavenly smell of butter filled the air around us. That being said the food was barely touched. Moments after it was brought out, the couple leaned over and commented, "I just don't think white parents are suitable to raise a black child." All of our mouths dropped open. Anger bubbled inside of me as my family tried to keep our composure. My mother's front lip quivered with both anger and fear that Sydney had understood what the woman was talking about. Luckily, a server was standing right by and notified the manager who quickly told the couple to leave immediately. Even after

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the couple had left, my hands still shook with emotion and shock that someone could have been so blatantly rude towards my innocent, defenseless little sister.