

DIFFERENT
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Sarah was in for her 15th surgery. This was her last chance to look normal. If this surgery didn't work she would be banished to a secluded colony with the rest of the "freaks". Sarah wanted nothing more in her life than to be normal and fit in with everyone else. In her earlier years Sarah's parents had hidden her away from everyone. Kept her in the house, and made her wear dark glasses, hats and scarves whenever she did go out. But now Sarah was 21 and it was well past time for her to take a job and be looking for a mate. That's why she needed the surgery, to look normal, no one would hire her or marry her looking as hideous as she did.

Sarah was sitting up in her hospital bed, with her face completely wrapped in bandages, when her doctor walked in to check on her.

"So Sarah, how are you feeling today?" The doctor, a red fox, asked in a soft, caring voice.

"Oh. Um Okay I guess. Just anxious to see if this surgery took." Sarah replied.

"Now Sarah, I feel I have to warn you that this surgery may not take either. You need to prepare yourself for the possibility that nothing will change. And that you may have to go to one of the rehabilitation colonies." The doctor said as he pulled up a chair and sat down carefully placing his short, red fox tail into the space in the back of the chair.

"I know, I know. But it just has to work! I can't be exiled! I want to be normal, I have to be normal! If I'm sent to one of those, those prisons, I'll never see my family again! It's not even allowed!"

"Shh! Calm down Sarah, You'll only upset yourself and make the healing process take longer. You HAVE to keep calm. Now, you have some visitors. Are you willing to take them?"

"Who is it?"

"Your parents. They want to talk to you before your bandages come off."

"Yes, send them in. And I'm okay, I can stay calm. I just really want this to work."

"All we can do is pray and hope... I'll go get your parents." The doctor said as he brushed the fur away from his eyes and started for the door.

Sarah's parents, both Bengal tigers, announced their presence as they walked in the door.

"Sarah, honey, it's mom, and dad is here also. Are you ok?" Sarah's mom, Elizabeth, said as she and Sarah's father, Jake, walked across the room.

"Oh mom! I feel ok, it's just I want so badly to be like everyone else. I don't want to never be allowed to see you two again."

"Princess... I just know things will work out okay." Sarah's father said, as both father and mother sat down and straightened their orange and black tiger fur. "We got them to put you in the room with the butterflies painted on the walls, that way the first thing you'll see when they take off the bandages is the butterflies. I'm sure that this surgery will take and you will be as beautiful as a butterfly."

"I'd just settle for being normal, dad. I'm feeling tired and tomorrow the bandages come off, so maybe you should go. Tomorrow you can both come back and watch as the doctor takes off the bandages."

All that night Sarah could not sleep. She tossed and turned thinking, remembering. She remembered back to the first time she realized she was different. She was six years old and began to realize that her parents always made her stay inside while all the other kids in the neighborhood were playing outside on beautiful, warm, sunny

days. She wasn't even allowed to peer out around the thick curtains that had covered all the windows in the house. Finally one day Sarah asked her mother why she wasn't allowed outside to play with the other kids. Her mother had sighed and set aside the sewing she was doing and told Sarah to sit down and listen carefully. Elizabeth continued on to say that Sarah was born different from everyone else. Different in such a way that no one could overlook, no one could ignore. If people knew what she was, they would be afraid. Afraid of the difference, afraid of the unknown. She would be ridiculed and shunned. She would very quickly be labeled a freak and taken to a colony for others born like she was. Sarah had gone upstairs to her room and sat by the window, with a mirror in her hand, alternating between peering out her window at the other kids and scrutinizing her own reflection in her mirror. From that day on she was constantly reminded of her difference and both felt ashamed for how she was born and wished that the rest of society would accept her.

Finally morning came and with it the time to remove the bandages. Sarah's parents had come back, as had her doctor and a couple of nurses to help. What scared Sarah though were the two guards stationed just outside her door, ready to take her to a colony if this surgery didn't work. The doctor began to slowly remove the bandages while everyone looked on holding their breath to see what Sarah looked like. To Sarah it seemed the bandages were never ending. The doctor couldn't remove them fast enough. All Sarah could do was wait and hope. Finally the last of the bandages were removed and one of the nurses slowly turned up the lights, being careful not to do it so fast that she hurt Sarah's eyes. As the room began being filled with light everyone turned to look at Sarah's face and gasped.

"What?!" Sarah asked. "Can I have a mirror? Please, I want to see what I look like!"

The nurse, her eyes tearing up at the failure of another surgery, quietly handed Sarah a hand mirror. As Sarah's eyes adjusted she looked into the mirror and lightly touched her face.

"No! No it can't be! Please don't make me go to the colony! Please no!" Sarah exclaimed as she began sobbing.

Sarah continued to look in the mirror as she touched her cheek and forehead. She kept thinking, *I still look like one of those freaks they call 'humans'. The short, pink, furless nose. The crescent mouth with red lips. And the hideous half circle ears on either side of her head, with no fur on her face at all.* She still didn't look like a fur but like one of those "humans".

"Doctor, please! Isn't there anything else you can do?" Sarah asked hysterically.

"I'm sorry Sarah, you know that was our last hope. There's nothing else we can do. Guards it's time."

Sarah, still sobbing, kissed her parents goodbye then allowed the guards to escort her outside and into the waiting cop car. The cops waiting in the car to escort her to the colony looked back at Sarah with disgust and pity. As the car started to pull away from the curb Sarah saw a butterfly flit past her window and knew she would never be a beautiful butterfly. She would never be anything but one of those hideous "humans".