Moony Star Moony Star

by marci stillerman

a lost children stor

MOONEY STAR

I once had a full-time name.

When I lived with my mom I was called Mooney Star, because I was made in moonlight and starlight, my mom said.

When I was four years old, there was a cake and four candles and I and Mom blew them out and a lot of other people helped. Then Mom put me to bed when it was still daytime. My hands was sticky and I fell asleep licking cake off of my face.

I woke up in the dark carried by someone, got took in a car.

"Mom?" I must of said, because he said, "Not Mom. Ray. Be a good girl and I'll give you ice-cream when we get there."

When we got there, it was a big, dark room and a lady washed my hands and face and put me to bed. No ice cream. In the morning, I and a lot of children, some bigger, some littler, ate oatmeal and milk at a long table and played in a sand-box and slides and swings. A big lady stood around and watched us. She wiped my nose and said she was Miz Lillian.

"What's your name?" a girl asked.

"Mooney Star."

"That's not a real name," she said. Her name was Mavis Brown.

In a few days I got a new name. Miz Lillian took me away from the play yard, washed my face, put on me a clean blouse and took me in the front room where the children can't go. A fat, smiling lady was there.

"This is Miz Purvis," Miz Lillian said. "She might take you home with her."

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"Yes, I'll take her," Miz Purvis said. "Have her ready tomorrow." And to me she said, "Now your name will be Purvis. Gloria Purvis. Do you like that name?"

I nodded. I still remember it because it was the first time someone gave me a new name..

I said the name over and over and over all the rest of the day and until I fell asleep at night. Next morning the name was in my mouth when I woke up. Gloria Purvis.

At breakfast, I told the girl sitting next to me that my name was Gloria Purvis. That's nice, she said. She didn't say it's not a real name.

At Miz Purvis' house was a lot of children, maybe four or five, all sizes, and a baby. They was all brown, dark and light. Miz Purvis was the darkest brown. I liked them all a lot and they liked me. The ones that went to school showed me their books, some with pictures and showed me letters and numbers. I helped Miz Purvis with the baby, Bodie, feeding him and running after him on the stairs so he wouldn't fall. I was Gloria Purvis, Glory, Miz Purvis called me and she said I should call her Ma, like the others. I thought of my own ma who called me Mooney Star because I was made in moonlight and starlight.. I wondered if I would get back to there.

After awhile a lady came called by Ma the Social Worker. She talked to me about how I was getting along and if I was hungry and if I played with the other children. I told her and she wrote things down in a big white book. On the outside of the book I could see C A S E 1229, letters and numbers I knew because the school children showed me. When the Social Worker left, Ma put me on her lap and I put my head against her softness. It felt good.

"Honey, Glory, tomorrow you are going away from here," Ma said.

"Why?" I must have asked because Ma said, "All us Purvises are black people, don't you see? And you are a white child. It would be better for you in a white home."

"No," I said. "I can be black, too. I won't go."

Ma laughed and kissed my head.

And then I went to another house and another house and another house and another house. And I always got another name: Smythe, Landers, Jacobs, Severs, Manhauser. Sometimes I forgot and told the wrong name. I did not want any of those names.

Some houses was big, some small, and sometimes I had a bed alone or slept with another child. Everything always different. I ate everything given. Sometimes the other chldren was nice, sometimes not. Boys was usually rough but not mean. Girls could be mean and tattletale. The grownups was all kinds and I kept away from them. Even if they tried to make up to me. No use liking them or not. Soon I'd go to another place with another name. I never got a name I could keep for my own.

I never forgot when my name was Mooney Star like moonlight and starlight, for I was happiest then.

When I was five (no cake and candles) I was brought to school. More different children and lady teachers. Some nice, some not. I could not do things as good as others like write my name and numbers. Or draw in the lines. I just couldn't. I didn't want to make the teacher mad, but I did. And when I got my name wrong, the teacher said I had a problem.

The Social Worker found me wherever I was and came there with the white book. She asked me questions, harder ones now. Do you like school? No. Are you ever hungry? No. Does anyone hurt you? Yes, sometimes. Who? People. Children. I don't tell who. Do you feel good? Yes. Sometimes I have stomach ache. A loose tooth. Are you happy? I don't know the answer to it. I laugh sometimes. I cry a lot. I get punished some. You don't behave, she says. You fight with the children, don't clean up your messes, break things. Talk back. You must try to be a good girl. She writes everything in the book called C A S E 1229.

You're getting big, the Social Worker says. When will I be through getting big? When you're grown up. And what will I do then? Anything you want. You must listen to the teacher so you will

learn something. Then when you are grown up, you can do anything you want.

I know already what I want to do when I grow up. I want to walk on every street until I find the house where my mom is. Where I lived when I was four. Where I blew out candles on the cake. I want to have my own name, Mooney Star, a name that has a meaning: moonlight and starlight.

It is, too, a real name.